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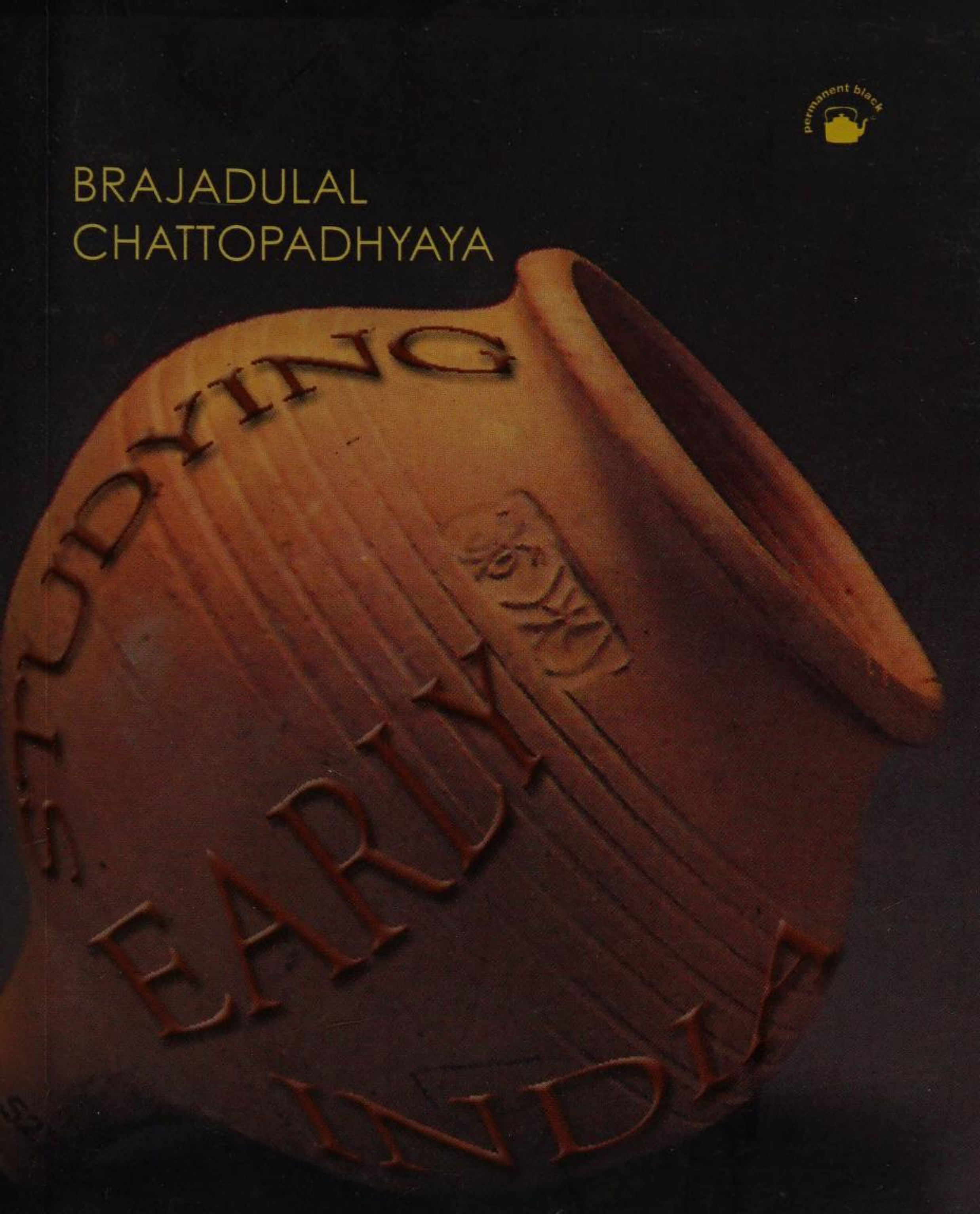
BRAJADULAL CHATTOPADHYAYA



STUDYING EARLY INDIA

Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues

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Studying Early India

for

Professor Ram Sharan Sharma

and

Professor Romila Thapar

a modest token of appreciation
of scholarship and fortitude

Studying Early India

Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues

Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya

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Preface

This compilation of articles, written on disparate themes and on different occasions, owes its publication to Rukun Advani. I have chosen only such articles for the collection as reflect somewhat my own position on what I would consider certain key areas in the study of early Indian history. They have been grouped into several sections to suggest what these areas are. In preparing the collection for publication I have not attempted to substantially revise the texts or update the references; alterations and additions in both have been kept to a minimum. My excuse is that I have not found adequate reasons to change my position on any of the issues discussed in the articles; my arguments remain the same today. On the other hand, if I were to write on the same issues now, I would perhaps attempt further studies and thus run the risk of not completing anything at all. The book is intended to suggest ways of looking at facets of early India, on the basis of material available from and on early India. Early India, admittedly, is an imprecise term, but search for a precise chronological definition is not the aim of this book.

I acknowledge with gratitude my debt to the publications in which many of the articles included here were originally published.

B.D. CHATTOPADHYAYA

Introductory

CHAPTER 1

The Study of Early India*

> In our wish to make ourselves heard, we tend very often to forget that the world is a crowded place, and that if everyone were to insist on the radical purity or priority of one's own voice, all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and a bloody political mess.—Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

Historians often tend to think, not altogether without reference to the implications of such a manner of thinking, that history-writing can be conveniently seen as a succession of one ideational position after another.[1] The rapidity with which the nature of history-writing has been changing, particularly in the Western world, does indeed make it attractive to situate different varieties of product by historians in their respective chronological and philosophical contexts. The distance between the finality premise in some variety of positivist history and implied scepticities of more recent positions in post-modernism,[2] when embedded in actual historical narrations, is too wide to be ignored.

And yet, coming to the crafts of the practising historians, even when one considers only the voluminous output of a specific genre like 'Indology', placing historical narratives along a straight evolutionary line, by way of writing on historiography, may have its own problems. For one thing, quite a few practitioners of the craft may continue to adhere to what has been abandoned by fellow historians as obsolete. Second, increasingly, the arena where the historians practise their craft is becoming an arena of contestation, and a perspective used to evolutionary inevitability may miss out why a particular position in historical narration proves to be more stable than others. To resolve whether episodes and fragments are more illuminating and worthwhile historical enterprises than long-distance narratives is a debate which may not be satisfactorily resolved

*Published as the first Professor Rajendra Joshi Memorial Lecture under the title 'Historical Perspective and Its Distortion' by the Institute of Rajasthan Studies, Jaipur, in 2001.

at all. More and more, the audience, exposed to growing varieties of the product, is turning eclectic,[3] and, if one were to go beyond the histories that alone are deemed prescribable as material worth institutional lessons, it may soon become impossible and perhaps irrelevant to regard history as a discipline requiring a specialized group of practitioners. Whether that scenario will be desirable in the long run is a matter to which we shall turn later.

Turning to the historiography of India's early past, the disjuncture between pre-colonial modes of history-writing and the way Indology developed from the close of the eighteenth century to the achievement of political independence, from a colonial regime and beyond, has been of supreme significance for the shaping of our cultural consciousness itself. Despite claims occasionally made that our historical consciousness, like our cultural consciousness, is essentially nation specific and primordial, what should strike anyone about the ways we think of our past is that the major premises that seem to govern our historical thinking today are all creations of our colonial past. Neither the *Itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition, which is representative of the articulation of historical thought of early India,[4] nor the Islamic distinction between the pre-Islamic barbaric past and the birth of true history with Islam,[5] will explain how we currently periodize our history or fashion our historical icons. This disjuncture needs to be stressed properly because of another reason. While we consider viewing historiography as succession from imperialist, nationalist, Marxist, structural, post-structural or whatever the current modes may be, that common threads may run through all these modes is a historiographic possibility and they all need to be traced out. The distinctiveness of each mode of history-writing is sometimes underlined so much that the hidden commonalities tend to be overlooked. For historiography, this ought to be counted as an avoidable lapse, for the future agenda of the Indian historians to write about early India has to have an awareness of its current constraints to start with. Whatever be the ideological source of a particular variety of writing on early India, the overarching framework within which such varieties can be located has to accommodate two contradictory pulls. One is the assumption that Indian history is the polar opposite of European history (since this has been the constant reference point for writing Indian history) either in terms of absence of history in the former, or in terms of an altogether different trajectory. The second is the pull of the manner in which the mode of writing history itself was developing. Despite some very major differences in the nature of sources available, the mode of the construction of Indian history during the

last two hundred years or so has followed the shifting modes of history-writing in the West. Even in the heyday of the nationalist urge for the writing of Indian history, the literate elites who thought and wrote history did not invoke the *Itihāsa-purāṇa* mode of history-writing, although such and other hagiographical modes had by no means become defunct in the Indian history-writing tradition. This clear choice, despite the opposite pulls of imperialist and nationalist concerns, would suggest that there emerged, deriving from the hegemony of Western historiography, a comparable, if not a common, definition of the historian's space. The nationalist premise could thus turn imperialist in retrospect. The rationalization and moulding of the past in imperialist terms could extend to such vital areas of historical premise-makings as periodization; placing of the Aryans in the centre of the civilizational impulse; the north–south dichotomy; the concept of 'golden ages' and so on. The pervasiveness of this common space can be properly understood only when we undertake detailed historiographical analysis of the majority of our historical writings being produced and marketed every year and also of what continues to be communicated institutionally and through public media.

II

To say that our major historical premises, including what are bandied about as of pure '*Svadeśī*' brand, derived essentially from colonial historiography is also at the same time to invite a necessary qualification, which is to shift to metamorphoses of historical perspectives and of modes of history-writing. If there was never any total homogeneity in the 'Western mode', colonial historiography too consisted of a wide spectrum of strands. There has nevertheless been the hegemonic trend. The point I would like to make is that in terms of the major approaches adopted by historians today, there are varieties of ways in which history can be written, and to suggest that all non-Indian writings on India necessarily carry over essentialist colonial premises, or that all writing reflecting awareness of transnational models and concepts do not have any relevance for the study of India is not a very rational position to take.[6] Colonial historiography does indeed continue even in this 'post-colonial' era, but locating such historiography[7] and its various incarnations calls for familiarity with a wide range of writings; defining it exclusively in geographical terms is a cheap way out.[8] It is so not only because defining colonial mode in geographical terms alone is singularly devoid of insights into the roots of nationalist historical ideas which such definitions seem to espouse;

such definitions of colonial historiography also refuse to recognize that major departures, through awareness of what may be considered comparative social science concerns, can and do take place within national boundaries. Thus, when D.D. Kosambi was repeatedly underlining the urgency of studying living Indian traditions by undertaking fieldwork, in order to better understand the Indian past, he was, in view of his Indian experience, stressing the need to go beyond written records which constituted the staple source-material of both colonial and nationalist historians.[9] Kosambi obviously was not invoking the pre-colonial indigenous modes of historical thinking and history-writing, but was drawing upon the methodologies and concerns of social science disciplines with which he had familiarized himself. He was at the same time watchful to examine how relevant they were in explaining the uniquely Indian context. Where he may have strayed from his objective is where he overstressed the relevance of particular models he preferred to choose.

I have cited the case of Kosambi's writings to illustrate my point that evolving a framework for cultural and historical characteristics of a society does not bypass concerns for universal history. In fact, what one writes is always a response, one way or the other, to ideas in general and not to ideas delimited by geography. No national culture is homogeneous, which means that there have always been overlaps also in the past, and as I have tried to show elsewhere,[10] insisting on the unique, superior history of an exclusive cultural regime can only give us history which is both fundamental and ridiculous.

If, despite the special characteristics of different human societies and cultures, studies on their histories constitute ultimately an agenda of universal, human history, then that ultimate agenda, which is an ever-dynamic agenda, can be handled by historians, only if national history is part of that larger agenda, and national historians follow the craft of the possible. Otherwise, Indian history and also archaeology will create a community of specialists increasingly incapable of communicating with the international community of archaeologists, historians and of social scientists in general.

III

The practice of the craft of the possible follows from an awareness of the state of the art and of fields of consensus. This underlines the tremendous importance of historiography in the pursuit of the art of the possible. Consensus does not carry here the sense of unanimity on generalizations,

but relates to the broad field of questions which continue to emerge and which can provoke fresh historical probings, initiate searches for new varieties of sources and, often, also new angles from which to view even familiar sources. Despite the multifaceted writings on 'Indian Feudalism', presenting viewpoints totally opposed to each other, no serious students of Indian history will argue that questions relating to the theme are unwarranted.[11] Even the arguments raised by the 'oppositionists' are a part of the field of the consensus. The presence of essential subjectivity at the core of historical enquiries notwithstanding, it is these fields and not any particular ideational positions in abstraction which perhaps enable the craft of history-writing to be on the move. The fields of consensus, not by ensuring unanimity but by opening up spaces for communication, are then real benchmarks in stages of historiography. These stages are reached when hitherto unavailable or neglected sources suddenly come into focus and generate fresh questions and perspectives, when major shifts take place in considering the histories of the historically invisible,[12] when entirely new horizons—from physical-geographical to mental—loom up before the historian or when history starts relating to other fields of enquiry in unprecedented ways.

That history-writing with regard to India's early past has moved considerably over the last five decades or so is obvious, although, as mentioned before, historiographical significance of the movements, or of lack of them, is not so obvious. For example, priorities are definitely redefined; if shift to social and economic history was considered a major priority at one time, the devotees of critical theorists mostly tend now to take cultural history as the brand of history inherently superior to other brands. What is not recognized usually is that shifting of priorities does not necessarily and automatically follow shifts in ideational positions. Major historiographical shifts can be caused by a variety of reasons. If pre-Mauryan and post-Mauryan invasions of northern India occupied a large space in imperialist Vincent Smith's *Early History of India*[13] and in the *Cambridge History of India*, vol. 1,[14] they were not so insignificant in H.C. Raychaudhuri's classic *Political History of Ancient India*[15] or in what might be considered the most well known among nationalist history-writing projects: *The History and Culture of the Indian People*[16] and, for that matter, in *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 2,[17] a product of the multi-volume Indian History Congress Project. Today, Achaemenid, Macedonian and post-Mauryan Yavana–Śaka–Pahlava–Kuṣāṇa history are part of a much larger pattern of pan-Indian history even where history is stated through the chronology of major dynasties. The reasons for the

shift from predominance to marginalization will have to be worked out through detailed empirical research on varieties of historical writings. One obvious reason which comes to mind is the replacement of 'invasions' as a causal factor in the making (or unmaking) of Indian history by consideration of other processes which perhaps view impact of invasions as subservient to and subsumable under deeper historical 'events'.[18]

Shifts in priority may also occur or may not at all occur even when there is a 'field of consensus' urging towards such a shift through accumulation of evidence (quantity crying out for quality!), through shifts in comparative historiography, and through the growing irrelevance of an area of priority. Let me try and illustrate this by referring to the 'Aryan' question in the Indian context. The beginnings of text-based Indological studies leaned heavily on the concept of the 'Aryans', and of 'Aryanization' as the major civilizational process in India. There are two dichotomies which the priority of the 'Aryan' agenda created: the 'Aryan–non-Aryan' and the 'Aryan-Dravidian'. The dichotomies seem to have disappeared somehow in narratives which deal with histories of 'post-Vedic' periods: with the spread of the 'Aryans' and the effective operation of the process of acculturation, the formation of an all-India cultural pattern was considered to have been achieved.[19] The state of recent research on the 'Aryan' problem is a telling commentary on the fact that the 'Aryans' continue to be regarded far beyond a 'speech community'. If V. Gordon Childe, way back in 1926,[20] considered it worthwhile to view the 'Aryans' in archaeological, material culture terms, the quest for the Aryan original homeland, material culture, ethnicity, pattern of colonization, etc. are issues which continue to be vigorously pursued and located within the context of Indological studies even in the late 1990s of the twentieth century.[21] And yet, accumulation of archaeological evidence from different parts of India, particularly during the last six decades,[22] ought to have made us aware of the multiple sources of Indian cultural patterns and of the possibility of looking at the texts from perhaps more meaningful angles. Viewed from the perspective of what historians consider important issues pertaining to the formation of early societies and cultures, issues such as the passage from hunting-gathering to food-production, stratification among farming communities, pastoralism–agriculture linkage, transition from chiefdom to state and so on, do not have to continue to seek out the 'Aryans' as the sole civilizing agents. To a historical perspective which accepts the premise of stages of social evolution, the 'Aryan' as the sole and universal agent of social change becomes

irrelevant; that is, unless one believes in a primordial Aryan Indian civilization without beginnings.

Methodologically then, the integration of what archaeology can tell us in any overview of the past will mean recognition of the existence of the multiplicity of cultural enclaves in the subcontinent in all stages of evolution: from hunting-gathering to urban. Archaeological cultures are both time and space specific, with qualifications of course, much in the same way as epigraphic records of later times, with similar qualifications, were. The perspective of spatial difference or spatial integration is an important corrective to the way we view culture change in terms of unilinear succession from one stage to another. However, if transition to a pattern of culture which combined food-production with other forms of subsistence took place in an area of Baluchistan as early as the seventh-sixth millennium BC,[23] that does not suggest inevitable change over to agriculture throughout the subcontinent. In fact, the archaeological record of the history of Indian agriculture, of the formation of the village and of pastoralism, which had disparate spatial foci and spheres of interaction and which preceded by many centuries the emergence of a new phase of urbanization, should be a strong pointer to the need for replacing the unilinear schema of economic periodization which we tend to follow as model for uniform and simultaneous change.[24]

At the same time, the total bypassing of the text as historical evidence which seems to be suggested in certain quarters, from the process of the understanding of early cultures,[25] is a kind of archaeological fundamentalism which is unlikely to improve our vision of the past. How methodologies of archaeology and 'text' study can meaningfully converge is far from approximating a 'field of consensus', and, in fact, often induced convergences are only exercises in rabid fundamentalism. These inadequacies are not inherent in historical sources themselves but in what we expect them to tell. Considering only one type of written or codified collection of words, structured to constitute a particular genre as 'text' is by itself a choice—a selection. Predetermining its usefulness for the chronicler of the past raises more serious problems. For example, when the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* was considered a more worthwhile text for the historian than a whole corpus of texts such as the *Purāṇas*, the usefulness or otherwise of the *Purāṇas* as possible sources for historians had been predetermined, the assessment having been made on the basis of whether the *Purāṇas* could yield information of the kind which one could get out of the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*.[26] The major use of 'texts' for historians was thus generally in the form of

compilation of what are considered as historical data; these data are then ordered to reconstruct the society of which the text was the product.[27] Texts have thus been taken to provide names for historical epochs; notions of historical ages such as the 'Vedic Age' and the 'Epic Age' have not altogether disappeared from overviews of our early past, intended for audience of all levels.[28]

Even an awareness of the fact that our major texts do not necessarily correspond to a distinct chrono-cultural span, as defined by archaeology or in other terms, has not deterred our archaeologists and historians from attempting to make two disparate sets of source-material to become mutually compatible. In a way, the attempts are inevitable in particular contexts when comparisons are held permissible by considerations of geography and chronology. There is thus nothing inherently skewed methodologically in trying to compare the material life revealed by later Vedic texts and the cultural pattern of a particular geographical region (Indo-Gangetic divide, eastern Rajasthan, upper Ganga basin) in what has come to be called the Painted Grey ware archaeological phase (*c.* 1000–500 BC).[29] It must however be recognized that the correlation remains within the limits of a possibility and cannot be an established fact transcending all debate, for can there at all be an exact correspondence between selected 'historical data' of later Vedic 'texts' and geography, chronology and archaeology?

The nature of the problem of such correlation becomes glaring when selected 'data' from the epics are deployed to prepare an agenda for 'epic' archaeology, which, in a way, becomes a prelude to 'Vedic' archaeology or 'Aryan' archaeology. A selection of 'traits' and suggested correlation can then further be used as an arsenal of indisputable scholarship and expertise for suggesting the strength of the logic of intended identities. Thus, even the curious identification of Harappan civilization with 'Ṛgvedic civilization' is supposedly based upon a comparison of traits.[30] The suggested truth of the identity which subsequently passes on to the non-specialist audience as a palatable history capsule is in no way deterred by the essential prerequisites of the archaeological study of a civilization and those of historical analyses of a corpus of texts. For example, Harappan civilization, like any other civilization, is located within a context of evolution—and devolution—of a process spanning several millennia. Archaeologists are all aware of this process, but not when, in their agenda of identification, they isolate one Harappan phase away from the totality of this chronological span. The corpus of Vedic

texts, product of oral compositions and compilations also of a long, barely ascertainable chronological span, must need be understood preliminarily with a reference to the chronological distinctiveness of the *Ṛgveda* and the later corpus which evolved over time, to the slow evolution of rituals and thought, and to internal suggestions as to what processes of historical change may be indicated. Given these basic requirements, which are not arbitrarily formulated but are articulated by competent authorities on archaeology and on texts, undertaking to establish facile identities, namely, Harappan civilization = 'Ṛgvedic' civilization is, even as a charitable assessment, a devious as well as cheap way of escaping the rigours of research on the past.

Indeed, the problem of how archaeological data and texts can be viewed together does not concern early Sanskrit texts alone. Early Tamilaham too produced a rich corpus of poems, often used by historians to reconstruct early Tamil landscape and society, available in the form of anthologies, enveloping the 'internal' as well as 'external' worlds in their modes of poetic representation. Of what kind of archaeological, material cultures were the Sangam poems products? The anthologies, in recent historical analyses, have been taken to represent a society which was pre-state and pre-urban, but with their different *tinais*—different landscapes, different modes of living and different responses—they relate to different segments of the macro-region of Tamilaham. Even within a broad time-frame it would perhaps be impossible to relate these differences to Tamilnadu's archaeological cultures with any great measure of success. Similarly, do the sites of Tamil epics, as in the case of the Sanskrit epics, have any correspondence in archaeology?[31]

The difficulties, in a sense, may explain the growing wariness among archaeologists and their keenness to distance themselves from written evidence. Perhaps, a graver reason behind this growing exclusivity of the archaeologists is the use of archaeology as a legitimization device. The notion, held dear by many, that archaeology is more scientific than other disciplines often gives the impression that if any conjecture can have a 'proof' in the form of archaeology, it achieves the status of scientific truth. Tradition, available both orally and in written form, then loses its distance from 'historical fact', it becomes historical fact. The simplicity, in such a view, of archaeology, of history, of texts and of tradition is a dangerous simplicity; it does not admit of uncertainties or hesitations.

However, the apprehension notwithstanding, any separatism among archaeologists, which implies that historians take over only where

archaeologists leave off is only the reverse of the fundamentalism of text studies, which continues to focus on 'culture' in the sense of uniquely mental and Indian, capable of being unravelled, in segments, through the study of texts. The 'textual' fundamentalism is that of analysis of particular kinds of texts, available in the recent spate of publications, drawing heavily upon anthropology, sociology, psychology, critical theory and what else is available in the market but barely with any reference to various other sources with ascertainable chronological contexts which alone can make intelligible the making of India through different stages of change. The recent focus on 'cultural history' is essentially a focus on 'texts'; a familiar example of this would be the spate, in recent years, of research and publications on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, along with publications on the *Mahābhārata*, as if to make the point that even to students of history the epics are the only prism which can reflect the genesis, the variety and the history of India.

I shall try to demonstrate the methodological problems created by these fundamentalisms, increasingly constituted by the self-chosen separatisms of the specialists themselves of their domains, by giving one more example. Mathurā, on the banks of the Yamunā, has been and continues to be a site, in various senses of the term, of key significance in India. The pre-literate archaeology of the site has been so far nothing beyond the ordinary and does not really explain the significance associated with the site. The archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and art material from Mathurā available roughly for the period between the third-second century BC and the fifth century AD, spanning the years of Mathurā's local rulers, the Parthians, the Scythians, the Kuṣāṇas and the Guptas, documents the richest phase of the history of Mathurā as an ancient historical city.[32] Mathurā of tradition—the city and the region which were the site of Kṛṣṇa's exploits—was not the site of pre-literate archaeology, nor did it repeat the site of literate, early historical archaeology. It was a city in which the pre-literate, pre-urban Mathurā could be a component, but the site—the habitat of a pre-state community whose hero could be perceived as a hero of epic proportions and finally a god—was also the city of a chief-king who conquered evil. The historical site may have ceased to be a city of any consequence, after a point of time, for the archaeologists, but the city of the texts was a city enriched by imagination, a city eternal.[33]

The variety of sources, which bears upon the study of early Mathurā, or for that matter of any site of Indian tradition, may suggest, if separatedness of specialists' domains continues, that there is mutual exclusivity of the domains. There is no reason why this should be so.

Mathurā of the 'texts' is as real to students of history as Mathurā of pre-literate archaeology and Mathurā of the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas. Only, in place of looking for a reflection of archaeology's Mathurā site in the texts (or vice versa), the student of Mathurā of the past has to reorient himself to understand what kind of site the texts were attempting to construct, and when and why.

IV

Returning to historiography, we need then to discard the naivete that we invariably move from one kind of historiographical ideology to another or from 'conventional' to what is more 'progressive' or 'scientific'. To characterize the history of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri as 'conventional' and the works of modern historians on south India as more 'systematic and methodologically sound',[34] or to call 'political' history conventional and socio-economic history 'progressive', does not by itself suggest directions of historiographical change. From the foregoing discussion, it should be clear by now that such change can be gauged only in two ways: (i) by analysing whether there has been any shift in the major premises which constitute the blueprint for the narrative which the historian attempts to construct. Shifting the focus from the 'Aryan factor' to archaeology for a preliminary understanding of the stages of the evolution of early Indian civilization would be such a shift; (ii) by examining whether the ways in which we conceptualize our sources and use them are also undergoing any major change. It is not simply the addition of a substantial body of archaeological or other evidence to the existing corpus of sources that I refer to; it is more the kind of questions which are framed and which archaeology and other sources can be expected to answer. Texts too no longer have to justify their use as historical source as provider of 'hard' facts alone; they can open up and have indeed been opening up areas which are increasingly expanding the frontiers of history.[35]

Shifts in major premises can take place only when practitioners of the craft of history can keep pace with these expanding frontiers of history, that is, by strengthening the case of comparative history. The plea for comparative history may be seen by some as a sure recipe for the perpetuation of the hegemony of Western historiographic mode, for the subordination of Indian history to the designs of occidental historiography. The problem of working out an approach, which is neither utter romanticization of the past of a colonized country nor the 'flattening' out of the special history of a culture is indeed acute.[36] However, apart from the fact

that history as an academic discipline today is not identical with history and ideology at the threshold of the era of political colonial hegemony, the ready availability of themes of national historiographies to international enterprises for more than two hundred years ought by now to have brought out the specific characteristics of colonial biases and thereby provided sufficient sensitivity and safeguards against threats of hegemonization. What is often forgotten is that there can be—and has been—another kind of hegemonization which makes the plea for national history, in what are conceived as national historiographic terms, unsustainable. Framed in such terms, national history cannot achieve anything beyond inversion of hegemonic premises because, as has been the experience of the past, in enterprises for writing history in nationalistic terms, aspiration towards hegemony is the only possible response to hegemony. Further, past experience also demonstrated that the agenda of what is seen as national history can be formulated differently by participants who constitute themselves voluntarily into different groups even within what is defined as a national boundary.[37] Although it may appear unbelievably and unachievably idealistic to talk about safeguards in an increasingly scepticized vocation of the historian, safeguards against hegemonization are built into the particular series of sources which historians of a society handle, curiously, because of the built-in biases of the sources. Hegemonization occurs not because historians distinguish between societies in terms of their assumed traits of difference; but, as already suggested, hegemonistic premises persist in their inversion. There can be reverse hegemonism, as in the assumption of natural cultural and spiritual superiority of the Indians—as in similar claims to superiority of institutions and culture of the Europeans. Safeguards against hegemonism, which may have diverse origins both within and outside national boundaries, will then have to be looked for in the ways sources originate, and the ways they change—in other words, in the logic of the formation of the sources. Even when traits of difference are dissolved, comparable historical formations still yield different texts for the historians. Historical formations such as sedentarization of subsistence-related activities, state formation, urbanization, social stratification and so on do not produce identical texts in all societies. The perception of difference in the formation of these texts in their specific locations in an ever-moving society is at the core of comparative history. Citing parallels, commonly confused with comparison, is poor history; comparing Samudragupta with Napoleon or the 'author' of the *Mahābhārata* with the 'author' of the Greek epics illuminates neither Indian nor European history.

The proactive relationship between the 'state of the art', the questions it generates and the sources of our knowledge of the past provide the reason why we need to keep on assessing our views of the past. It is this constant response to what is available which makes history as an academic discipline, like any other discipline, a going concern, saving it from the philistinism of hordes of history-mongers.

To sum up, if we add to the ideological dimensions of historiography essential requirements built into the craft, as it is practised beyond the confines of specific societies, then this dynamic relationship between the ingredients of historical knowing and reconstruction has, during the last five decades, to be very clearly seen in the new foci of early Indian studies. It is not only that archaeology, previously a much neglected source, has provided a completely new orientation to how we view the origins of Indian civilization; written texts too have started suggesting numerous uncharted avenues along which we can explore the past.[38] Our reluctance or reservation—and at times utter opposition—to engaging in explorations (which themselves go through mutations) is a fundamentalism which in no way can be an ultimate deterrent to the dynamism of the discipline.

V

History in the end is communication, and the historian a conscious mediator, the use of the term 'conscious' being with reference to the act of making a choice. The present has many ways of making demands on the past,[39] including, in extreme cases, the demand for surrender of history to one hegemonistic view and to one agency with sole authority to communicate. The intrusion of the present in such demand for exclusivity is wholly political; the past then becomes an instrument for the legitimization of an agenda. This agenda can be the exclusive glorification of a region or a macro-region (or seeking exclusivity for such regions); it can be the construction of a particular icon; it can be—as it has been in the past—a major ideological agenda of totalitarian and fundamentalist regimes.[40] An authoritarian regime, as in several cases all over the world during the nineteenth century, takes over the sole agency of communication about the past, and by the very logic of its existence, annihilates or totally subordinates other voices of history.

What may happen in an apparently innocuous atmosphere of resurrection of traditional culture and its dissemination is selective presentation of chosen texts from the past. Bypassing history, or, in other words, the historical contexts of which the texts were products, past culture is thus

created (sometimes even concocted) and communicated for the edification of the consumers of the present. Selective presentation and exegeses of texts have been and are a common practice in religious discourses; it has also been a mode for constructing a cultural pattern which is viewed as intrinsically superior to what any other society can offer. It was through such a construction that nationalist historiography was trying to posit a rationalization of the past. Selective highlighting of a text is a way of legitimizing the past. The legitimized past, which is not the historical past but an idealized past, is then presented as a panacea for the tensions of the present, because in the idealized past of the selectively highlighted texts, the society is seen to have already found ways of resolving its tensions. Seen in this perspective, a few chosen maxims of a text can be made to convey any intended meaning.[41] The *Arthaśāstra*, which is a text advocating maximization of resources and authority of the monarchy, can thus be seen as a treatise for socialism of a welfare state,[42] the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as a text of desireless action[43] and *Manu-Smṛti*, an epitome of Brāhmaṇical patriarchy, as a text upholding the dignity of women.[44] The dilemma of a professional historian working with a set of workable codes of construction and communication available to him should then be understandable; the world of the past seems to be increasingly going beyond his grasp.

One need not, however, in the end resign oneself to the inevitability of historiographical anarchy or free-for-all. The historiography of early India, with particular focus on the last five decades or so, appears to introduce to us the uncertainties or points of critique, which also constitute the points of departure in any academic discipline. Ultimately, it is the uncertainties in response to the available premises which move a discipline along. Accumulation or uncovering of new sources by itself does not raise these uncertainties, but when they do rise and provoke response, they can be a dependable test that interpretation and communication of the past are not entrapped into a deep quagmire from which escape is impossible. It is the conviction of certainty in relation to the difficult reality of the past which is the agenda of fundamentalism.

Notes and References

1. I refer here to the tendency, among Indian historians in particular, to group histories into approaches characterized as Imperialist, Nationalist, Marxist and so on. Analytical works on early Indian historiography are however still inadequate, and what are passed off as historiography are essentially works which compile lists of publications relating to textbook themes. See, for example, S. Goyal, *Recent Historiography of Ancient India* (Jodhpur, 1997).

Among the few publications relating to themes in ideological contexts, in early Indian history, the following may be read with profit: R.S. Sharma, 'Historiography of Ancient Indian Social Order', in idem., *Perspectives in Economic and Social History of Ancient India*, 2nd revised edition (Delhi, 1995); idem. and D.N. Jha, 'The Economic History of India up to AD 1200: Trends and Prospects', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 17 (1974), pp. 48–80; Romila Thapar. 'Interpretations of Ancient Indian History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 1–25; idem., *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi, 1975); S. Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 6, pts 1–2 (1979–80), pp. 1–63. For a recent statement on the historiography of early India, see the collection: Romila Thapar, ed. *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, 2nd revised edition (Bombay, 1998).

2. For a relevant recent discussion, see Sumit Sarkar, 'Post-modernism and the Writing of History', *Studies in History*, vol. 15 (2) (1997), pp. 293–322.
3. The trend is no longer suggested by shift from dynastic history, with emphasis on genealogy and chronology, to social and economic history, although the shift was indeed a major departure in early Indian history-writing in two meaningful ways: (a) social and economic history came finally to be separated from the ups and downs of dynastic fortunes, (b) the shift opened up spaces for interaction with disciplines like social anthropology, political science, pre-capitalist political economy, etc. The recent eclecticism which in its positive aspect may be considered as not a denial of social formation approach but rather an extension of it has opened up, in unprecedented ways, crevices of history, which reorient our ways of thinking also about what was visible so far. Histories of mentalities, of alternative cosmologies, of gender are some of the areas available to the audience long fatigued by dynastic/diplomatic narratives. In the context of early India, too, recent studies on women mark a significant break from the social history of the past. See Kumkum Roy, ed., *Women in Early Indian Societies* (Delhi, 1999). An excellent example of the combination of what may be considered 'eclecticism' with historical perspective is the recent work of Romila Thapar, *Śakuntalā: Texts, Readings, Histories* (Delhi, 1999).

   For treating work of this kind as representing an extension of social formation approach, I have in mind D.D. Kosambi's seminal essays: 'Urvaśī and Purūravas' and 'At the Crossroads: A Study of Mother Goddess Cult Sites', in *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture* (Bombay, 1962).
4. As an early survey of texts representing the historical tradition of early India, mention may be made of U.N. Ghosal, 'Studies in Ancient Indian Historiography', in *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, 2nd revised edition (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 1–167.

   Among the many writings of Romila Thapar on this theme, the following

may be consulted, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Delhi, 1978), chs 13-14; also, idem., *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (Delhi, 2000), chs 7–8, 33–6.

5. See H. Mukhia, ' "Medieval India": An Alien Conceptual Hegemony', *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. I (1998), pp. 91–106.
6. That cultural differences require different histories is an argument which is raised time and again. How each 'cultural' context can provide its 'infrastructure' (except in the form of source-material for studying it), as Leon J. Goldstein calls it (*Historical Knowing*, University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1976, pp. 140–3), for historical research is not clear. 'Infrastructure', it may be argued, is not simply the evidence, but more importantly, the modes/methods of analysis as well.
7. See Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York, 1998), particularly ch. I, for relevant discussion.
8. The major weakness of the notion of 'Colonial Indology' as articulated in Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology: Socio-politics of the Ancient Indian Past* (Delhi, 1997), is his predetermined equation of historians rather than historical premises in terms of what may be characterized as 'colonial', A. keener probe would have revealed intrusion of 'colonial' into deeper, unsuspected recesses, including what he would consider 'national', and, by implication, 'rational'. In fact, Chakrabarti's own analyses in chapters like 'Interplay of Race, Language and Culture' (ch. 2) show how difficult it would be, in constructing historiographies, to disentangle the 'East' from the 'West' after the birth of Indian history-writing in the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries. One also needs to ponder carefully over what Chakrabarti desires in his preface:
   '. . . any alternative sense of this past should be something in which all Indians, irrespective of their individual affiliations, can feel having a share'. The desire is for a dangerous, single-dimensional nationalist agenda of writing about the past; it does not seem to admit that all Indians may not find it possible to subscribe to one 'alternative sense' of the past. Second, as I argue in the text, Indian past, or any other segment of human history for that matter, cannot be the exclusive preserve of a single 'indigenous' perspective for the simple reason that no such perspective has ever existed.
9. See my 'Introduction' in D.D. Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, compiled, edited and introduced by B.D. Chattopadhyaya (Delhi, 2002).
10. 'Cultural Plurality, Contending Memories and Concerns of Comparative History: Historiography and Pedagogy in Contemporary India' in the present collection.
11. For the fact that the debate is alive among professional historians and other academics who seem to create further space for research without claiming to have resolved the debate, see the following recent publications: R.N. Nandi, *State Formation, Agrarian Growth, and Social Change in Feudal*

South India, c.A.D. 600–1200 (Delhi, 2000); D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 2000); H. Mukhia, ed., *The Feudalism Debate* (Delhi, reprinted 2000); R.S. Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation* (Kolkata, 2001).

12. See note 3.
13. Vincent A. Smith, *Early History of India, from 600 BC to the Muhammadan Conquest, Including the Invasion of Alexander the Great*, 4th revised edition (Oxford, 1924).
14. E.J. Rapson, ed., *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. I (Ancient India), 1st Indian reprint (Delhi, 1955), chs. 14–15, 17, 22, 23.
15. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India: From the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*, revised edition with a commentary by B.N. Mukherjee (Delhi, 1997).
16. R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, vol. 2 in the series, 3rd impression (Bombay, 1960).
17. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 2 (The Mauryas and Sātavahanas) (Calcutta, 1957), chs 6–8. These chapters deal with the Greeks, Śakas, Pahlavas and Kuṣāṇas who are perceived as foreign; it is stated that 'the downfall of the Kuṣāṇa empire is brought about by a resurgence of indigenous rule in the third century'.
18. For example, concerns about the decline of the Mauryan empire or that of the Gupta empire is today of less significance than patterns of trade, urbanization and state formation in the post-Maurya period and the nature of 'feudal formation' in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.
19. The notion of the Aryanization of India, the major premise of which is not only the spread of Sanskrit but also of ethnic Aryans with advanced material culture (thereby keeping alive the Aryan–non-Aryan dichotomy) can be seen in such titles as N.K. Dutt, *Aryanization of India* (Calcutta, 1925). The use of the term 'Aryan', despite with its variants, as a generic category largely in an ethnic sense precludes the possibility of looking at it from a historical perspective: that is, viewing 'Ārya' as denotive of status, in which heterogeneous elements could and did come to be accommodated.
20. V.G. Childe, *The Aryans* (New York and London, 1926).
21. See the recent collection of essays which present results of ongoing research: G. Erdosy, ed., *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity*, 1st Indian edition (Delhi, 1997). Among Indian writers, the continuing interest about the Aryans represents approaches of two kinds. In one, the nineteenth-century invention of the Aryan race is sought to be used for the purpose of the political agenda of establishing the superiority of the Hindu-Aryan past. The other approach represents attempts to understand the 'Aryan' problem academically in the sense that it takes cognizance of the ongoing research on the problem, from different angles, and in terms of international concerns about the problem. For some relevant publications, see R.S. Sharma, *Looking for the Aryans* (Hyderabad, 1995);

idem., *Advent of the Aryans in India* (Delhi, 1999); B.N. Mukherjee, *Itihāser Āloke Ārya Samasyā* (Calcutta, 1995); Romila Thapar, 'The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics', *Social Scientist*, vol. 24, nos. 1–3, pp. 3–29.

22. For synthesis of the growing volume of archaeological data many titles are available, among which the following may be cited: R. Subbarao, *The Personality of India*, 2nd edition (Baroda, 1958); H.D. Sankalia, *Prehistory and Proto-history of India and Pakistan*, 2nd edition (Pune, 1974); Bridget and F.R. Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization* (Harmondsworth, 1968); Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *India: An Archaeological History* (Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations) (Delhi, 1999).
23. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *India: An Archaeological History*, p. 121.
24. This is the impression one is likely to get if one envisages paces of change for the subcontinent as a whole, without taking into account the fundamental cultural variations at all points of time. Even for a major pattern in the form of settled and complex agrarian society to emerge over the entire subcontinent, one perhaps has to take the Gupta period (*c.* 300–600) as the most significant period of change. Attempts to delineate stages of economic change unilineally, without substantial qualifications and variations offered, will thus not be satisfactory, because such attempts are likely to be taken to reflect a subcontinental pattern. See, for example, R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, 2nd revised edition (Delhi, 1995), chs 11, 12.
25. In his 'preface' to *Colonial Indology* Dilip K. Chakrabarti writes: 'the book underlines the total inadequacy of ancient Indian texts to offer fine resolution historical images in chronological and geographical order, and argues that this goal is unlikely to be achieved by combining our historical texts with social science theories. This can be achieved only through grassroots investigations of the ancient history of the land and its interrelationships.'

    Apart from the fact that 'grassroots investigations' too require 'social science theories', the sentiment expressed is simply an extension of what others felt long ago. According to D.D. Kosambi ('Combined Methods in Indology', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 6, nos. 3–4, 1963, pp. 177–202), dependence on texts produced only a 'tunnel vision' of Indian history; the exclusively philological approach, Kosambi demonstrated, would lead to unsatisfactory interpretations of the texts themselves. Stressing the unworthiness of the texts can however be an obsession, a fine example of which is Chakrabarti's curious suggestion that in a study of the emergence of monarchy in early north India, a find of silver tiaras, associated with a crown, itself associated with royalty in Indian tradition, at a small site called Kunal in Haryana may tell us more about the emergence of 'regional political identities' than an entire corpus of texts pertaining to the 'Brāhmaṇical' tradition (*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 8, 1998, pp. 113–14). In Chakrabarti's notion of 'history' such problems as changes in the connotation

of the term *rājan*, the relationship between authority and power, legitimization, social inequality crystallized through the emergence of monarchy, elaborate rituals and sacrifices and so on are either not relevant for the study of early Indian society or can be resolved without any reference to what he calls ahistorical texts. Despite the growing volume of archaeological data, why archaeologists have not so far attempted to study the history of kingship and political institutions either for proto-historic or later times is not explained by Chakrabarti.

Archaeologists do use textual evidence not necessarily for one-to-one correlation with tradition but for understanding patterns through comparison, provided certain norms for comparison can be established. For example, both A. Ghosh (*The City in Early Historical India*, Simla, 1973) and G. Erdosy (*Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, Oxford, 1988, ch. 1) make use of early textual references to cities to great advantage when they study settlement pattern in the context of urbanization. On the other hand, there are very good avoidable examples of how archaeological data can be overstretched and turned into axioms unhesitatingly. See the volume edited by F.R. Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States* (Cambridge, 1995).

26. We continue to lament over the paucity of historical literature particularly because we seem to have rigid ideas regarding what history is about and what functions the available sources can perform. However, it is not clear why archaeology has to be used for the pre-literate phase of history alone, epigraphy and numismatics primarily for dynastic history, and texts for compilation of 'relevant' information on geography, economy, polity, society and so on. The point is that sources should not have preordained functions for historians. F.E. Pargiter's pioneering attempt to compile dynastic data from the *Purāṇas* (*The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, London, 1913) did not exhaust the potentiality of the *Purāṇas* as a source of history; for recent attempts to use the *Purāṇas* from an entirely different perspective, see Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition* (Delhi, 2001); Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A Historic-Anthropological Perspective* (Delhi, 2001).
27. An early example of this genre of research is V.S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Pāṇini* (Lucknow, 1953). This was followed by a spate of works on individual texts, epics, *Purāṇas*, lexicons, astrological works—which are all essentially of the nature of compilations of what are considered as data for history. There have however been other ways of looking at the construction and meaning of texts; V.S. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay, 1957).
28. Terms like 'Vedic Age' or 'Epic Age' have curiously been taken to suggest methodological possibility of historical reconstruction without reference to any other category of evidence which may be available for the period over which the texts, used as historical material, may have grown. Further, a text

or a corpus of texts may have evolved over a long span of time, a possibility illustrated by the process of the construction of all major early Indian texts, including the corpus of Vedic texts and the epics, the *Mahābhārata* in particular. Which layer in the text then represents the history of 'its age'?

29. For an attempt at this correlation, see R.S. Sharma, 'The Later Vedic Phase and the Painted Grey ware Culture', in D.P. Chattopadhýaya, ed., *History and Society: Essays in Honour of Professor Niharranjan Ray* (Calcutta, 1976), pp. 133–42. See also idem., *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1983), chs 4–5.

30. As a sample, see B.B. Lal, 'Rigvedic Aryans: The Debate must go on', *East and West*, vol. 48, nos. 3–4 (1998), pp. 439–48. Without going into the question of Vedic chronology, the equation of the Harappan people with the Vedic people leaves the simple questions unanswered: Which Harappan? Which Vedic? The quality of the method used by B.B. Lal and others in trying to arrive at the equation: Harappan = Vedic is thus inherently deeply flawed. Let me elaborate. In the attempted equation the Harappan is obviously mature, urban Harappan because in the attempted equation, references are sought to urban centres in the *Ṛgveda* and elsewhere. The Harappan urban phase represents one phase in the development and decline of Harappan civilization; it cannot therefore stand for the entire 'Harappan'. Similarly, anyone familiar with the structure of the corpus of Vedic texts (see M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, translated from the original German by Mrs S. Ketkar, vol. I, part I, 3rd edition, Calcutta, 1962) will be apprehensive about the equation of Ṛgvedic with 'Vedic times'. The Vedic corpus, despite interconnections between texts and traditions, is illustrative of basic changes in the tradition, and it is generally agreed that the latest phase of the corpus, overlapping with the early stratum of Pali Buddhist texts, may illustrate a movement, from a simple to a more complex society. Even if the reconstruction of this movement towards a particular kind of social change is not accepted by all, locating Harppan urbanization in the *Ṛgveda* will lead to the awkward position, for B.B. Lal *et al.*, of having to locate the phase of Harappan decline in the later strata of Vedic texts. The point then is that all archaeology–tradition correlations are not of the same merit, the quality of the method of correlation depending largely on the grasp one has of both the kind of archaeology one is talking about and of the meanings of tradition.

31. If one takes the anthologies of early Tamil poems and the epics as constituting the textual tradition of early Tamilaham, then the state of society represented by this literary tradition is generally taken to correspond to chiefdom society. See, for example, R.S. Kennedy, 'The King in Early South India as Chieftain and Emperor', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1976), pp. 1–15. Also, Rajan Gurukkal, 'Aspects of Early Iron Age Economy: Problems of Agrarian Expansion in Tamilakam', in B.D. Chattopadhyaya, ed. *Essays in Ancient Indian Economic History* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 56–7.

Gurukkal begins with the statement: 'Archaeology shows that Tamilakam was more or less a single culture-zone by the first millennium BC, with the diffusion of iron-using people of the black-and-red ware tradition.' Yet, it is difficult to see how this archaeological cultural uniformity will correlate with the concept of *aintinai*, governing the literary tradition of early Tamil poems and envisaging 'the five-fold division of man–nature situations in its historical and anthropological context'. The *Kuriñcitinai* which represents the essentially hunting-gathering, 'man–nature situation' in the hilly woodlands and *marutam*, the *tinai* of the settled agrarian tracts (K. Sivathamby, 'Early South Indian Society and Economy: The Tinai Concept', *Social Scientist*, no. 29, 1974, pp. 20–37), can hardly both be encompassed by an identical archaeological, cultural pattern. Further, the Tamil textual tradition, rooted in a society earlier than the region's early historical phase, nevertheless extends to several centuries of the historical phase as well, if accepted chronologies are taken into account. Despite meticulous attempts at archaeology–tradition correlation in the south Indian context (R. Champakalakshmi, 'Archaeology and the Tamil Literary Tradition, *Puratattva*, vol. 8, 1975–6, pp. 67–72), it is still necessary to remember that archaeology and textual tradition arrive essentially in different forms to chroniclers of the past because the stages through which they take their respective shapes are different.

32. For a useful collection of relevant articles, see Doris M. Srinivasan, general editor, *Mathurā: The Cultural Heritage* (New Delhi, 1989).
33. For textual references to Mathurā, see B.C. Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India* (reprinted, Delhi, 1976); N.L. Dey, *The Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India* (reprinted Delhi, 1984), pp. 127–8; also, N.N. Bhattacharyya, *The Geographical Dictionary: Ancient and Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 218–19. More relevant than simple references, for understanding Mathurā of imagination, is: R.P. Goldman, 'A City of the Heart: Epic Mathurā and the Indian Imagination', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 106, no. 3 (1986), pp. 471–81, particularly pp. 480–1.
34. This is essentially the point being made by R. Champakalakshmi in her 'State and Economy: South India, Circa AD 400–1300', in Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, pp. 275–317.
35. It seems worth repeating that once the fundamentalisms associated with particularistic approaches to the study of sources are dissolved, the immense range of meanings embedded in them tend to surface. After all, it was not preordained that archaeology would tell us only about technology and material goods, epigraphs about dynasties, coins about their issuers and their favourite symbols, and texts about rituals, beliefs and social ideals. The meanings that we can derive, after we are able to assess how wide or limited the 'field of consensus' is, are very clearly interwoven with the kind of questions we can ask, which, in turn, refer us directly to historiography and how adequate we find it. One can prepare a competent report on material found

at an excavated site; but, one can also ask questions on its environmental context; on the site's position in a possible series of settlements from the perspective of settlement hierarchy; on the type of social organization and intra-societal linkages that the assemblage may reveal, and also the 'material culture' signification of the artefacts found. There may be contestation over whether the site was urban or non-urban. The historical relevance of the contestation will ultimately be: whether it falls within the field of the consensus or not.

The current eclecticism of text studies may not have added significantly to historiography yet, but it is already clear how many types of intervention both Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit texts have been making, at least in our choice of themes we are seeking to explore.

36. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Post-Colonialism*, p. 18. The dilemma, as Loomba correctly guesses it, is between the tendency to eulogize the 'pre-colonial past or romanticize native culture' and that of regarding 'colonialism "as a minor interruption" in a long, complex history'.
37. For an elementary discussion, see my paper 'Cultural Plurality, Contending Memories and Concerns of Comparative History: Historiography and Pedagogy in Contemporary India' in this collection.
38. The references are too numerous to cite, but it should be quite evident from writings on gender, ideology, mythology and cosmology and so on that early Indian texts have taken on new meanings, and to discard, without entering into a meaningful discussion of what they purport to communicate, is simple obscurantism and nothing more.
39. There is a voluminous literature on the ways the present draws upon the past. For a useful anthology of essays on this theme, see Daud Ali, ed., *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1999).
40. An example of this would be the way the theory of 'Aryan' race—a race conceived as superior to all other races—ignited imagined past as well as vicious political agenda of the present. See, for references, Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology*; Romila Thapar, 'The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics', *Social Scientist*, vol. 24, nos. 1–3 (1996), pp. 3–29.
41. The selective use of texts for constructing what is called an Indian Ethos, which is projected as superior to what other cultures can offer to the modern world, has emerged as both a passion and fashion among non-historians. S.K. Chakraborty writes in defence of this timeless 'Indian Ethos', constructed by combining only ancient texts and their modern interpreters: 'It is clear that . . . writers are so much out of tune with the Indian ethos that they cannot fathom the truth that spiritual culture was the *sine que non* and the rest its effects—a characteristic unique to India' (*Human Response in Organizations towards the Indian Ethos*, Calcutta, n.d.). See also idem., *The Management and Ethics Omnibus* (Delhi, 2001). Chakraborty's notion of the uniqueness of the Indian Ethos, based on selective references to early Sanskrit texts

alone, leaving out even texts in other Indian languages, is a carryover of nineteenth-century cultural attitudes which tended to hierarchize societies and cultures in terms of superior/inferior attributes.

42. H.C. Ray, 'Was State Socialism known in Ancient India? (A study in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*)' *Sir Asutosh Silver Jubilee Volume* (Calcutta University), vol. 3, pt I, pp. 429–46.
43. See for example the chapter 'The Teachings of the *Bhagavad Gītā*' in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 2, with an Introduction by C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar (Calcutta, 1962).
44. V. Raghavan, the great Sanskrit scholar, commenting on the *Manusaṃhitā*, writes: 'Manu and other ancient Indian thinkers had also a conception of women according to which they did not like women to be exposed to the rough and tumble of an unprotected, independent life; and it is in this spirit that Manu says that a woman shall always be taken care of by someone . . .

Critics of women's position as set out above should note that they are indulging in unfair comparisons when they judge conditions in ancient India which have come to prevail only in recent times in the West. Till recently the position of women there was hardly praiseworthy, whereas the Indian lawgivers in those remote ages of antiquity had great regard and consideration for women', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 2, pp. 353–4. Historiographically, two points are of significance in Raghavan's comments: (i) he finds it necessary to invoke the West, (ii) there is no attempt to explain how considering women unfit for independent status (*Manusaṃhitā*, 9.3) or equating them with the Śūdras (*Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, 4.5.4.) could be compatible with according high status to them.

For justified scepticism in this regard even among some nationalist historians, see R.C. Majumdar's chapter on 'Social Conditions', in *The Age of Imperial Unity* (vol. 2 of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* series, Bombay, 1960), pp. 561–3.

CHAPTER 2

Indian Archaeology and the Epic Tradition*

Archaeology and Historical Issues

CHAPTER 2

Indian Archaeology and the Epic Traditions*

Archaeological work on sites mentioned in the epics is not new. While a number of them were covered in the surveys of Alexander Cunningham,[1] more recently two such sites, Takṣaśilā and Ahichatra, have been excavated with a high level of stratigraphic precision.[2] What is, however, new is an effort to correlate archaeology with the epic evidence and to reconstruct the epic milieu in the light of archaeology. The present essay aims to review the work already done as also the work proposed to be done in this direction, with an initial reference to the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. It will, in the process, examine the assumptions which have led to the highlighting of epic tradition in the context of archaeology and attempt a purely personal assessment of what contributions such assumptions are likely to make towards the progress of Indian archaeology.

Perhaps the first work in the way of correlating epic tradition with the archaeology of north India was by B.B. Lal who explored a number of sites mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, excavated an important '*Mahābhārata*'[3] site,[4] and initiated digging at Purana Qila, the site which is believed, by tradition, to represent Indraprastha of the *Mahābhārata*. Talk about the archaeology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is more recent. H.D. Sankalia who made a brief exploration of Ayodhyā and collected PGW sherds there seems to be of the opinion that an excavation at the site is likely to shed considerable light on the *Rāmāyaṇa* mystery.[5] A more comprehensive justification is worked out by B.B. Lal[6] who has already completed the first season's excavation at Ayodhyā.[7]

I

Both these pleas and what else has been mentioned above imply an archaeology of the epics. Let us try to grasp its meaning in relation to the

*Reprinted from *Puratattva*, no. 8 (1975–6), pp. 67–72.

Rāmāyaṇa to begin with. What Sankalia attempts broadly is to indicate the archaeological range which can correspond to the growth history of an original *Rāmākathā*, apart, of course, from an analysis of the internal evidence. Archaeologically, the final dates are suggested to him by the description of such cities as Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā 'which were built between the Kuṣāṇa and Gupta periods' (alternatively, he suggests a third-fourth century BC date for the descriptions of Ayodhyā).[8] While the time span which the descriptions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* sites can cover is thus as broad as eight hundred years, the position with the early stratum of the *Rāmākathā* is no better. One item in the cultural equipment of this stratum, namely, weapons, is taken to indicate the Iron Age, suggesting 800 BC as the earliest possible date.[9] If one were to draw comparisons with Homer's allusion to an already lost Mycenaean civilization,[10] reference to iron weapons may have been a case of transferred value—from bronze to iron—in an age which had grown used to iron. And indeed Sankalia thinks also in terms of the foundation of Ayodhyā 'about 1500 BC or latest 1000 BC'.[11]

The position would really not be simple even if one were to assume that the core of the *Rāmākathā* related to the Iron Age. In terms of the archaeology of the Gaṅgā valley this may imply, although it has not been clearly spelt out by Sankalia, the period of the PG ware culture or that of the NBP ware. Sankalia's ingenious finding that the earliest stratum of the *Rāmāyaṇa* portrays an Ayodhyā in which the houses were made of mud[12] does not help because burnt brick houses did not come to be constructed on a large scale in this region before about the second century BC anyway.[13] And the least one can hope for in the proto-historic sites of the area is the evidence of single culture occupation which may recognizably correspond to any of the layers of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

What also has been totally ignored by the advocates of *Rāmāyaṇa* archaeology is the total spatial dimension of cultures. If one accepts the findings of D.R. Chanana's research—of which incidentally neither Sankalia nor Lal seems to be aware—the '*Rāmāyaṇa* society' incorporates two types of cultures, one tribal, represented by that of the *vānaras* and *rākṣasas* and the other agrarian, that of the kingdom of Kośala.[14] This differentiation on the basis of the traits available in the *Rāmāyaṇa* should have helped not only to recognize the nature of the additions made subsequently to the traits (such as the account of the city of Laṅkā which will have no archaeological correspondence, if it is supposed that the *rākṣasa* society represents a tribal stage of culture, a supposition subscribed to by Sankalia too in his characterization of Rāvaṇa as a Gond chief),[15] but

should have had several archaeological implications as well. First, it will have involved a search for an archaeological correspondence to the geographical distribution of two types of cultures, assuming of course, that the original stratum of the *Rāmāyaṇa* did in fact represent these two types. The archaeology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* would in such a case not simply have covered a few select sites of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but would have demanded a study of the relationship in which the archaeology of Uttar Pradesh and northern Bihar stood with reference to the regions in which the *rākṣasas* and the *vānaras* may be supposed to have been located. And all these suppositions in an apparent chronological void would have indicated the kind of problems a not-too-comprehensive coverage of *Rāmāyaṇa* archaeology was likely to confront.

The spread of settled agriculture is a part of the problem of Indian archaeology in general, but the relative advance made in different periods is supposed to be indicated in the two epics—an indication which, if it were dependable, would have led to important assumptions regarding the chronology of the completion of the two epics.[16] Archaeologists like B.B. Lal have already speculated upon their relative chronology from a different perspective, partly on the basis of an already worked out literary synchronism and partly on the basis of an attempted correlation between archaeology and the evidence of local tradition. Basing himself on the synchronism worked out by H.C. Raychaudhuri who, on the strength of a passage in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, showed Janaka to be later than Parikshit and possibly contemporaneous with Nicakṣu,[17] Lal remarks,[18] although with some reservations,

> It may incidentally be recalled here that it was in the time of Nichakshu that Hastināpura was washed away by the Gaṅgā and the capital was shifted to Kauśāmbi where a developed form of the Painted Grey Ware has been encountered at the lower levels.

Lal seems to be little aware that he contradicts himself in the next paragraph by depending on a local tradition at a '*Rāmāyaṇa*' site, which identifies the harpoons of the Copper Hoard complex as arrows of Lava and Kuśa, thus favouring the claim of the Copper Hoard culture as being that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[19] As Lal himself associates the Copper Hoard culture with the OCP on the basis of circumstantial evidence,[20] the contradiction involved here in believing the *Rāmāyaṇa* to represent both a late phase of the PGW and the Copper Hoard culture is obvious. It is not at all being suggested here that the *Rāmāyaṇa* cannot cover the time span of two cultures, but then such an admission would clearly recognize the

difficulty of approaching the 'archaeology' of the epic sites in terms of any ill-founded assumptions regarding their relative chronology.

Let us probe this point about relative chronology a little further in literary and archaeological terms. If, as assumed by Sankalia, the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not represent a pre-Iron stage and if, along with the already cited evidence of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the story of the colonization of Videha, as narrated in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*,[21] is considered in this context, then the *Rāmāyaṇa* story and consequently the archaeological sequence at least of northern Bihar would appear to have been later than that of the Kuru–Panchāla region, perhaps the locus of the *Bhārata-Kathā*. A comparative economic study of the two epics, however, does not seem to bear this out; Chanana who made such a study sums up his conclusions in the following words:[22]

> . . . a comparison of these few pockets of cultivation in the valley of the Ganges with the area of cultivation as described in the *Mahābhārata* (taking only those regions of the Ganges valley, which were ruled by the princes belonging to the *Kaurava* and *Pāṇḍava* families) shows us that during an intervening period, cultivation has spread further.

There can in fact be no unanimity regarding the relative chronology of the two epics. Their growth process, spread over a number of centuries, presupposes a considerable degree of overlapping in time, and it may be too much to expect that the chronology of a few 'epic' sites, even after they are correctly ascertained archaeologically, will settle the problem of relative dating. To reiterate a point made earlier, the advocates of the archaeology of the epic sites do not speak of the entire range of places mentioned either in the *Mahābhārata* or in the *Rāmāyaṇa*: the first phase of the five-year project on the archaeology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* sites does not even include Mithilā or Videha in north Bihar.[23] The explanation for the selection of sites may be that the initial focus ought to be on the core sites of the epics, but such an explanation gives rise to the problem of another type of selection: the criteria for the selection of literary data for correlation with archaeological evidence.

This perhaps brings in a bigger question of the relative reliability of different categories and strata of literary tradition; one need not go into any details here but point to only what is strictly relevant to the context of the archaeology of the Gaṅgā basin. As a preface to what will be said later on we quote V. Gordon Childe.[24]

> . . . the *Kṣatriya* (i.e., the Epic and Puranic) tradition . . . is hardly an unpolluted source of history. The orthodox view is not really based on the priestly

tradition, as embodied in epexetical works, but rather on the internal evidence of the Veda itself. The latter carries conviction precisely because the historical and geographical references in the hymns are introduced only incidentally. . . . The same cannot be said of the *Kṣatriya* tradition, which in its recorded form dates from an age (perhaps as late as AD 200) when myth-making had had many centuries to work in, and which might serve dynastic ends.

Several other reasons, apart from these general features of the internal evidence of several categories of literary sources, compel one to turn to Vedic rather than epic and Purāṇic data for correlation with archaeological evidence. It is widely admitted now that the stages in the societal evolution of the Gaṅgā basin and its peripheries are indicated in the Vedic tradition[25] and chronologically at least the PGW and NBP Ware phases in the archaeology of this region broadly coincide with the period generally known as the later Vedic.[26] As has been shown by Raychaudhuri, many traditions are common between the Vedic and the epic sources (in fact this is the basis of many synchronisms worked out by him),[27] and while the epics continued to grow, thus making it practically impossible to isolate their different strata from one another, their early milieu may be believed to have been preserved in the Vedic tradition.

Why the epics and not the Vedic or early Buddhist sources have been the concern of the archaeologists is another matter, but the point just made leads us on to another dimension of the Vedic evidence which is of crucial importance so far as the archaeology of the Gaṅgā basin is concerned. The Vedic texts show an unmistakable shift from tribe to territory,[28] a common enough corollary to the transition to a stratified agrarian economy. Areas of settlements—their names associated with various groups—are mentioned throughout the later Vedic texts, and the list of sixteen *mahājanapadas* as given in the Buddhist *Aṅguttara-nikāya*[29] was anticipated in such later Vedic references.[30] The 'epic' sites of the Gaṅgā basin and its peripheries, which have so far been shown to be of archaeological potential, are in fact subsumed in these settlement areas or *janapadas* which provide the territorial milieu of the early strata of both the epics. By the sixth century BC different types of settlements such as *grāma, nigama* and *nagara* had emerged within the framework of the *janapadas*,[31] and this literary classification has two important bearings on an analysis of the archaeological data: (i) the archaeological culture of a region ought not to be considered as monolithic; the culture assemblage at rural, commercial or urban sites is likely to have varied considerably, (ii) the process of the formation of *janapadas*, if understood

in literary terms alone, implies the evolution of a composite type of culture,[32] and as such it should be considered risky, if not at times totally futile, to single out any particular archaeological cultural trait for correlation with literary evidence. This point may be a little elaborated by reference to the archaeology of the PGW phase at Hastināpur. The PG ware itself has often been understood in terms of the Aryans;[33] the distribution of the PG ware sites tallies excellently with that of the Pūru-Bharatas leading to D.D. Kosambi's identification of PGW with 'Pūru-Kuru ceramics'.[34] And yet wheel-made pottery is, so far as the Vedic literary evidence is concerned, post-Ṛgvedic, and in view of its association with the Asuras, probably a non-Aryan craft.[35] Two other cultural traits of this phase, namely rice and such domesticated animals as pig and buffalo are shown to have had an 'eastern cultural bias'.[36]

The point of this rather lengthy digression was to show that traditional evidence—here represented by the evidence of literary texts—and that of archaeology can perhaps meet only at certain points. For the proto-historic cultures of the Gaṅgā basin, neither the genealogical accounts of royal families nor the distribution or movements of individual 'tribal' groups are likely to provide such common meeting grounds. The point may perhaps be reached by undertaking a total structural study of society and the major trends of societal change in terms of both archaeology and literary tradition.

Second, the roots of both the epics in so far as they are embedded in any organized literary material have to be traced in the process of the formation of the early *janapadas*. Hastināpur and Indraprastha were two important centres of the Kuru *janapada*, Ayodhyā of the *janapada* of Kośala and Mithilā of Videha.[37] The neglect of this type of correlation, beyond which it is perhaps not possible to go at this stage, explains why the PGW has been sought to be understood both in terms of the Aryans and the *Mahābhārata* tradition.[38] The archaeology of the epic sites of the Gaṅgā basin can thus at best be the archaeology of its *janapadas* and nothing more.

II

We finally come to the examination of the plea for the archaeology of the epics from a different perspective—from the perspective of a 'consumer'[39] to whom such pleas are vitally related to the overall archaeological planning in the country. It is historiographically interesting to note that this plea has emerged over the years from an initially crucial archaeological

understanding 'to bridge . . . [the] vast gap of nearly twelve centuries'[40] between the Harappan and the early historical cultures. The possibility that what was put forward as a hypothesis might develop into an axiomatic truth in Indian archaeology was foreshadowed by A. Ghosh in his editorial notes on the Hastināpur excavation report:[41]

> The following report often refers to the *Mahābhārata* and the place-names mentioned in it and brings into prominence the fact that the Painted Grey ware is found at the sites associated with the story of that epic. Such references are easily understandable and even unavoidable, for was not Hastināpura the focus of the epic-tale? But a word of caution is necessary, lest the impression is left on the unwary reader that the Hastināpura excavation has yielded archaeological evidence about the truth of the story of the *Mahābhārata* and that here at last is the recognition by 'official archaeology' of the truth embodied in Indian traditional literature. Such a conclusion would be unwarranted. Beyond the facts that Hastināpura, the reputed capital of the Kauravas, was found to be occupied by a people whose distinctive ceramics were the Painted Grey ware in a period which might roughly have synchronized with the origin of the nucleus of the *Mahābhārata* story, that this occupation came to an end with a heavy flood and this ware is found at many early sites, some of which are connected, either in literature or by tradition, with the epic-heroes, the excavation has no bearing on the authenticity or otherwise of the epic tale. It is indeed tempting to utilize archaeological evidence for substantiating tradition, but the pitfalls in the way should be guarded against, and caution is necessary that fancy does not fly ahead of facts.

And yet the case for the archaeology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* sites is apparently based on the 'success' of the PG ware archaeology in unravelling the *Mahābhārata* mystery. Besides, the arguments given above to show that no particular archaeological phase can correspond to the *Mahābhārata* or for that matter *Rāmāyaṇa* times—because the span of 'epic' times can cover several archaeological phases—the backbone of the entire PG ware—*Mahābhārata* correlation, namely, the confirmation of the Purāṇic flood legend and the legend relating to the transfer of the Kuru capital to Kauśāmbi, may not be as strong as it looks.[42] And what kind of material remains have Hastināpur and Indraprastha revealed to provide points of comparison with the epic evidence? Admittedly, here archaeology can serve as a corrective to the exaggerated accounts of the epics, and the fact that there cannot be any one-to-one correlation between archaeology and tradition comes out clearly from a statement regarding Troy, supposedly one of the best sites served by tradition: 'There is something wrong either with Schliemann's Troy or with Homer's.'[43] On the other hand, the spade

digging at the epic sites in India has been expected to cover such an enormous range of questions as, one would suspect, take a Delphic oracle to answer: 'When did Rāma live? Where is Laṅkā?. . . and what about the *Mahābhārata*? Is it a fact or a fiction? How about the mighty palaces mentioned in this epic? And the weapons wielded by the heroes at the battle of Kurukṣetra?'[44] Questions such as these or whether 'any traces of Rāma and Krishna'[45] have been found have, in the final analysis, led to the emergence of 'epic' archaeology as a serious archaeological undertaking, because as one scholar admits, 'When questions like these cannot be answered, people, including scholars, think that we—archaeologists—are wasting our time and nation's money.'[46] It is precisely these considerations which have made the author of the present note feel wary: One would have expected archaeological planning and expensive excavations to rest on serious academic considerations and on the current state of research in archaeology and not on a decision to resolve certain emotional hang-ups regarding a particular epic hero or an archaeological site.

Methodologically too the 'epic' archaeology could produce important repercussions on archaeology elsewhere in the country. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are not the only two literary compositions in India which can provide a case for correlation with archaeological evidence. If a fresh digging at Kaverippumpattinam is undertaken, and if its excavator wishes to model his assumptions on the archaeology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he may no longer be excavating a site in the littoral region of the *Sangam* sources but may rather be searching for Kovalan and Kannaki, respectively the hero and heroine of the *Silappadikaram*.

Notes and References

1. *Archaeological Survey of India, Report for the Year 1871–72*, vol. VI (Delhi and Agra) (reprinted, Varanasi, 1966), p. 3; ibid., 1871–2 and 1872–3 (Report of tour in Eastern Rajputana), vol. VI, pp. 91 ff; ibid., vol. I, Archaeological Report for 1862–3, pp. 320–2. See also A. Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (reprinted, Varanasi, 1963) pp. 153, 303 ff. etc.
2. See A. Ghosh 'Taxila (Sirkap), 1944–45', *Ancient India*, no. 4, pp. 41ff; A. Ghosh and K.C. Panigrahi, 'The Pottery of Ahichchhatra, District Bareilly, U.P.'; ibid., no. 1, pp. 37ff.
3. B.B. Lal, 'Excavation at Hastināpura and Other Explorations in the Upper Gaṅgā and Sutlej Basins 1950–52: New Light on the Dark Age between the End of the Harappa Culture and the Early Historical Period,' *Ancient India*, nos. 10–11 (1954 and 1955) pp. 5–151.

4. See *Indian Archaeology 1954–55—A Review*, pp. 13–14; *IAR 1969–70*, pp. 4–5.
5. *Rāmāyaṇa: Myth or Reality?* (New Delhi, 1973), p. 45.
6. B.B. Lal, 'Archaeology and the Two Indian Epics,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. LIV, pts. I–IV (1973), pp. 1–8.
7. See the report in *The Statesman*, Delhi, 1 April 1975, p. 8.
8. Sankalia, op. cit., p. 46. The internal evidence alone of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the city of Ayodhyā, as available in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, gives a crucial clue for a dating which may correspond to its description: *Sāmantarāja-saṅghaiśca Balikarmābhirāvṛtām/Nānādeśanivāsaiśca vaṇigbhirupaśobhitām/Rāmāyaṇa*, 1.5.9, Baroda Oriental Institute edition, I, 1960. Here more than the description of the city, it is the expression *Sāmantarājasaṅgha* which is important. The expression *sāmanta* in the sense it has been used here cannot be earlier than the Gupta period.
9. Sankalia, op. cit., p. 16.
10. See M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 21.
11. Sankalia, op. cit., p. 45.
12. Ibid., p. 46.
13. A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India* (Simla, 1973), pp. 68–70.
14. D.R. Chanana, *The Spread of Agriculture in Northern India* (*as depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*) (New Delhi, 1963), passim.
15. Sankalia, op. cit., pp. 48–9.
16. How difficult it is to make an assessment of the relative advances made by different areas will be clear from a look at the agricultural regions of India around the middle of the second millennium BC. Agricultural practices in central and eastern India are certainly not later than in the upper or central Gaṅgā basin.
17. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, sixth edition (University of Calcutta, 1953), pp. 8–49.
18. Lal, op. cit. (1973), p. 7.
19. Ibid.
20. B.B. Lal, 'Further Copper Hoards from the Gangetic Basin and a Review of the Problem', *Ancient India*, no. 7, pp. 20–37.
21. I.4.I. 14–17.
22. Chanana, op. cit., p. 19.
23. See the handout 'Archaeology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Sites' published by the Archaeology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Sites Project, Gwalior, March 1975.
24. V. Gordon Childe, *The Aryans* (London, 1926), p. 32.
25. See D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956), chs 4 and 5; for stages in the evolution of economy, see R.S. Sharma, *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy* (Bombay, 1966), pp. 55–66.
26. See R.S. Sharma, 'The Later Vedic Phase and the Painted Grey Ware Culture', paper presented at the 35th session of the Indian History Congress, Jadavpur, 1974.

27. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., ch. II.
28. Ghosh, op. cit., pp. 4, 34.
29. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., ch. III.
30. Ibid., p. 58. The list of countries which Raychaudhuri has compiled for the age of Janaka includes many of the Buddhist *mahājanapada* list. That the Brāhmaṇical sources perhaps relate to an earlier tradition may emerge from the substitution of Vajjian confederacy for Videha in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* list.
31. See N. Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Bombay, 1966), ch. II.
32. Kosambi, op. cit., Chapter 4; for an analysis of the linguistic evidence, see Romila Thapar, Presidential Address, section I, Indian History Congress, Varanasi, 1969.
33. The hypothesis, first put forward by B.B. Lal, op. cit. (1954 and 1955), 10–11, pp. 150–1, has been extensively discussed among others by Dilip Chakrabarti, 'The Aryan Hypothesis in Indian Archaeology', *Indian Studies: Past and Present*, vol. IX, 4 (1969), pp. 349 ff. and B.K. Thapar, 'The Aryans: A Re-appraisal of the Problem', in Lokesh Chandra *et al.* eds, *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture* (Madras, 1970), pp. 156–8, 160–1.
34. D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline,* Indian edition (Delhi, 1972), p. 91.
35. S.R. Das, 'The *Mahābhārata* and Indian Archaeology', D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Bhārata War and Purānic Genealogies* (University of Calcutta, 1969), pp. 73–5.
36. Chakrabarti, op. cit.
37. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., ch. III, section I.
38. Lal, op. cit. (1954 and 1955), pp. 147–51.
39. For the sense in which the term is being used here, see Barun De, 'Encapsulation as an Alternative to the Difficulties of Periodising Indian History', in S.C. Malik, ed., *Indian Civilization: The First Phase* (Problems of a Source Book) (Simla, 1971), pp. 83–4.
40. Lal, op. cit. (1954 and 1955), p. 6.
41. A. Ghosh, 'Notes', *Ancient India*, nos. 10–11, pp. 2–3.
42. Das, op. cit., pp. 56–8.
43. Rhys Carpenter cited by M.I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 36.
44. Lal, op. cit. (1973), p. 1.
45. Sankalia, op. cit., p. 1.
46. Ibid., p. 2.

CHAPTER 3

Transition to the Early Historical Phase in the Deccan: A Note*

Historians, and archaeologists, working on the problem of the passage to early historical phase in Indian history have come to date it generally from the middle of the first millennium BC, that is the period of Buddha and Mahāvīṛa and of the *mahājanapadas*. Certain indices such as the emergence of early urban centres, metallic coinage, and later, of scripts for writing, are cumulatively taken as pointers to this passage. Following these indices, perhaps it would not be too far wrong to hold that the recognizable shape of the early historical period in the Deccan as also in some adjoining regions like Vidarbha emerged in the period of the Sātavāhanas. The stages leading up to the period of the Sātavāhanas are, however, at the moment far from clear, and this lack of clarity has in turn affected in a large measure our understanding not only of the structure of the Sātavāhana period itself but also of the broad processes which went into the making of the early historical society in the Deccan. What was happening in the Deccan in the pre-Sātavāhana and Sātavāhana phases was clearly not identical with the long span of culture change in north India leading up to the emergence of the Magadhan empire; yet, in the wake of the early historical period in the Deccan, there was a certain commonality in the cultural elements of the two regions, suggested, among others, by the use of a commonly derived script and of varieties of coins. This brief essay does not purport to examine the vast corpus of archaeological data from the Deccan, which have accumulated over the years, to understand the passage from the pre-Sātavāhana to the Sātavāhana phase; it simply attempts to provide,

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with focus on the significance of the numismatic evidence, a fresh review of the problem and to offer tentative suggestions.

I

Archaeologically, the immediate base line to start from for this review is the megalithic culture phase, although one ought to remember at the same time that megalithic and early historical do not necessarily represent two distinct chronological entities that could not have overlapped. While this implies simultaneous existence of the megalithic cultural tradition with the newly emerging historical culture and interpenetration between them (suggested by the evidence of coins and of pottery), there was a definitive change in the complexion of culture at sites where the megalithic phase was succeeded by early historical. This change cannot be viewed either in terms of a gradual evolution from the megalithic culture or in terms of a wholesale north Indian impact because by the stage the early historical phase of the Deccan crystallized, it had absorbed some elements non-indigenous to both north and south. However, chronologically, the appearance of north Indian traits, suggested by pottery, coinage, script and architectural and sculptural features (associated largely with *stūpa* at this stage), pre-dates non-indigenous elements,[1] and the transformation of the 'proto-historical' complexion of the culture of the Deccan, at its initial phase, may be viewed as deriving from interaction with expanding north and west–central Indian culture zones, dating to pre-Mauryan and Mauryan periods.[2] We may underline this at this stage because it will have a bearing on what we have to say later, suggesting that the transition derives essentially from interaction and not from administrative integration, despite the occurrence of Aśokan records in sufficiently large numbers, and the existence of the Mauryan administrative centre and officials, in the region. The understanding that is crucial, so far as the initial phase of the transition is concerned, relates to what was happening across the Deccan in the third–second centuries BC as a result of interaction with northern and central India, and the hypothesis we advance is that the process of the emergence of what we may call 'localities' marks this early transitional phase. And if we are to further understand the structure of the phase represented by the Sātavāhanas, whose power becomes recognizable from the first century BC, the 'locality' components of the Sātavāhana empire need to be given a consideration not generally accorded to them. An analysis of the structure of the 'localities' would involve detailed investigation into their archaeology; what is roughly meant is that 'localities' are represented by distinct (in most cases archaeological) early historical sites in relation to the

specific area in which they occur and by a pattern of control which is essentially limited to the area but which certainly interacts with other 'localities'. Mathurā and Kauśāmbi of north India of the immediately post-Mauryan period may be cited as examples of its two localities; however, both Mathurā and Kauśāmbi cover a long span of legendary and recorded history in their existence as *mahājanapadas* and for the Deccan of the stage we are talking about perhaps more appropriate parallels would be *Madhyamikā* of the Śibis[3] in Rajasthan or Agrodaka in Haryana.[4] Both, according to coins found in them, corresponded to distinct *janapadas*, and despite the absence of the term *jánapada* in the Deccan, the 'localities' may be taken to approximate what is conveyed by the term *janapada*. The passage of a 'locality' into the early historical phase in the Deccan would imply, to use north Indian parallels once again, some form of proto-state formation at a local level and this formation has to be ultimately seen in relation to the pan-Deccan empire of the Sātavāhanas of a later period.

II

To illustrate the process of the emergence and some traits of localities in pre-Sātavāhana Deccan we may begin by citing an epigraphic document which has been known to scholars for a long time but which has not been examined in relation to the archaeological data bearing upon the early historical phase of the Deccan. The Bhattiprolu relic casket inscriptions[5] from the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh speak of a *rājā* Khubiraka (Kuberaka) who had obviously emerged as a ruler in deltaic Andhra some time during the close of the second century BC. It would be incorrect to regard Kuberaka as a ruler of Andhra—in fact, the present state boundaries of Andhra, Karnataka or Maharashtra would be totally irrelevant to understand the nature of the 'localities' of the early historical phase. Epigraphic documents from other centres of Andhra may suggest the emergence of other 'locality' nuclei, not perhaps at the same point of time, but nevertheless distinct from one another. The structure of the 'locality' which *rājā* Kuberaka represented is not clear from the Bhattiprolu inscriptions which nevertheless suggest the association with it of certain groups such as Gośālaka, Siṁha, etc. Kuberaka himself was the *pramukha* of the Siṁha-*goṣṭhi*,[6] which suggests that the king was more a leader of the community than a monarch and that his community was one among others. What we have here seems to somewhat correspond to the *gaṇa-saṁghas* of the north, but since much of the contents of the Bhattiprolu inscriptions are not sufficiently clear, the point cannot be stretched. Further, the Bhattiprolu inscriptions seem to stand somewhat isolated at

the moment in the sense that the evidence provided by them cannot be immediately compared with parallels across the Deccan whereas it may be possible to do so with archaeological evidence. In the context of archaeological sites one may in fact proceed, even for the pre-Sātavāhana phase, from the pre-literate to literate stage, and this is where a consideration of the numismatic evidence, as the only regular series presenting the pre-literate to literate sequence in the same archaeological context, becomes relevant.

In the Deccan, the earliest uninscribed coin series is the punch-marked series. So far, unlike in north India, punch-marked coins do not seem to have been found, at the earliest levels, in association with uninscribed cast coins.[7] Although punch-marked coins continued to be manufactured in the early centuries of the Christian era, punch-marked coins of the Deccan which can be associated with localities—say, for example, coins from the Amaravati hoard,[8] the recently discovered Veerapuram (Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh) coins,[9] stray coins from Duvvuru-Athreru[10] or from Vaddamanu[11]—may date back to the Mauryan period. There were two other uninscribed series, now found to be widely distributed in the Deccan: the uninscribed cast coins and uninscribed die-struck coins.[12] The point which all these uninscribed series taken together make is that despite the possibility of their association with distinct localities of their manufacture, they indicate a network of contact within the Deccan in a period removed from that of high incidence of punch-marked and uninscribed cast coins in north India alone. The emergence of 'local' inscribed series of the Deccan has to be placed against this background. At sites like Kotalingala in Karimnagar district[13] and Veerapuram[14] in Kurnool district, both in Andhra Pradesh, inscribed coins seem to succeed uninscribed coins—much in the same way as inscribed 'local' coins[15] do in the north. This is not to say that uninscribed coins ceased to be minted; they continued well into the early centuries of the Christian era. But the inscribed coins, by providing the names of their issuers, for the first time reveal the 'political' profile of emergent localities across the Deccan and make comparisons with literary and epigraphic material possible.

That 'locality' rule preceded the emergence of the Sātavāhanas as a major power in the Deccan is by now sufficiently clear from the fact that coins such as those of the Kuras and coins with the appellation *Mahāraṭhi* both precede and overlap with Sātavāhana coins in stratigraphic contexts.[16] This stratigraphic position is now further confirmed by excavation at Veerapuram (Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh) where coins of local

Mahāraṭhis first merge with uninscribed coins and then occur with a few Sātavāhana pieces.[17] The two unstratified finds[18] at Kotalingala in Karimnagar district add substantially to our knowledge of this phase in that they provide names of local rulers like Gobhadra, Samigopa, Chimuka, Kamvaya, Narana, in addition to common Sātavāhana coin legends like Sātavāhana and Sātakarṇi. Sites which reveal transition to the literate early historical phase, through local epigraphy and coin series, are thus many: they extend across the Deccan from coastal Andhra through Karnataka to Maharashtra, from the 'locality' where Kuberaka of the Bhattiprolu relic casket inscriptions was a king to Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) where coins of local Kuras have been found in a pre-Sātavāhana context.[19] The transition from the phase of uninscribed coins to that of inscribed coins of local rulers is not enough to grasp the details of the processes involved, but a few suggestions may be advanced. If the Raṭhikas and the Bhojas of epigraphs[20] are considered to be sources respectively of the terms *Mahāraṭhi* and *Mahābhoja*, then the prefix in both terms would indicate the emergence of a higher status. The term *Mahābhoja* occurs in inscriptions[21] but not on coins; the term *Mahāraṭhi* occurs on both types of material. *Mahāraṭhi* was not used in relation to a community but was expressive of status, perhaps lower than that of one claiming to be a *rājā*, for a distinction in status implied by these terms is suggested by some coins found at Brahmapuri.[22] As a term denoting status, *Mahāraṭhi* was widely in use in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra. The pre-Sātavāhana Kuras of Brahmagiri used it, so did the equally early local rulers of Chandravalli and those of Veerapuram whose family name was perhaps *Hasti*.[23] The transformation of ethnic names Raṭhika and Bhoja into expressions of status—if such transformation is admitted—points to the gradual formation of a stratum of elites at the level of 'localities' prior to the emergence of the Sātavāhanas as a major power, and this process, taking into consideration different categories of evidence—archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic—can be located within the time span extending from the second century BC to the middle of the first century BC. This process did not by any means come to a stop once the Ṡātavāhanas rose to power; the penetration of a segment of the Mahāmeghavāhanas of Kaliṅga in the Andhra region in the Sātavāhana period[24] or the emergence of the Ikṣvākus and the Kadambas in the post-Sātavāhana period may be considered 'local' manifestations of the continuity of the same process. Applying the same perspective to an analysis of the early phase of the Sātavāhanas may yield fruitful results because it is likely to bring disparate data on them to some kind

of order,[25] but such an attempt will be beyond the scope of this essay. On the basis of the foregoing only the following points may be made:

(i) In the absence of a voluminous, roughly stratifiable literary evidence to supplement archaeological data,[26] the transition to the early historical phase in the Deccan has to be studied not by considering the time span from the second century BC to early third century AD as an undifferentiated one but by envisaging stages which would correspond to the changing nature of its archaeological material. Of special significance seems to have been the passage from the pre-literate to literate phase in the archaeology of this region—a change which introduces to us a stratum of 'local'-level elites emerging primarily from within local communities in a situation in which the network of cultural interaction was wide.

(ii) It has not yet been examined in detail how the history and distribution pattern of 'local'-level elites of the pre-Sātavāhana period should affect our view of the structure of the Sātavāhana period itself. The archaeological traits of the pre-Sātavāhana phase continue into the Sātavāhana period; in numismatics, for example, the most commonly used Sātavāhana coin metals like lead and potin were of pre-Sātavāhana origin. It has often been underlined that such groups as those of the *Mahāraṭhis* figure prominently in epigraphic records of the Sātavāhana period;[27] at the same time, there is the general impression that the stratum of local-level rulers was 'exterminated'[28] to make room for a unified structure of the Sātavāhana empire. It is doubtful if, despite the use of the title *dakṣiṇāpatheśvara*[29] by them, the Sātavāhanas ever achieved administrative integration of the entire Deccan. To cite numismatic evidence once again, the Kuras, the Ānandas and the *Mahāraṭhi* Hathi (Hasti) families seem to have existed, respectively at Vadgaon-Madhavpur (Belgaum),[30] Chandravalli[31] and Veerapuram[32] in the Sātavāhana period. For understanding the structure of the Sātavāhana empire, it may perhaps be more profitable to locate the 'nuclear' areas of the Sātavāhanas and to examine how they related to the 'localities' of the pre-Sātavāhana phase. To an extent this can be done by mapping out the *āhāras* or the administrative divisions of the Sātavāhanas and directly held centres such as Vijayapurī or Nagarjunakonda in different stages of Sātavāhana history. In contrast to the anonymity of 'localities', the Sātavāhana *āhāras* (some of which, like Govardhana, may be

identified as having centred around well-known archaeological sites) were officially designated areas, and if the emergence of territorial names in the Deccan, such as those of Andhrāpatha, Veṅgi, Karmarāṣṭra, Kuntala, etc. is considered a departure from the earlier anonymity of 'localities', then we may envisage a further stage in the development of the historical period in the Deccan, deriving from the Sātavāhana phase.

Notes and References

1. Contact with the Roman world on a significant scale, which accounts for the presence of non-indigenous archaeological objects and traits in addition to coins, can be dated from the second century BC.
2. This is suggested not only by the *Arthaśāstra* account of the advantages of the *Dakṣiṇāpatha* route (VII.12–24) but also by such sources as the *Suttanipāta* in which Pratiṣṭhāna is linked with various points like Ujjayini, Kauśāmbi, Śrāvasti and even Rājagṛha; cited in Motichandra, *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 23–4.
3. For details, see K.K. Dasgupta, *A Tribal History of Ancient India—A Numismatic Approach* (Calcutta, 1974), pp. 148–67.
4. Ibid., pp. 1–16.
5. G. Bühler, 'The Bhattiprolu Inscriptions', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 2, pp. 323–9; also D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I, second edition (Calcutta University, 1965), pp. 224–8.
6. According to M. Williams the meanings of *goṣṭhi* are: assembly, meeting, society, association, family connections (esp. the dependant or junior branches), friendship, partnership, fellowship, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1986), p. 367.
7. For references, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'South India', in *A Survey of Numismatic Research (1978–1984)*, vol. 2 (London, 1986), pp. 772–83.
8. P.L. Gupta, *The Amaravati Hoard of Silver Punch Marked Coins* (Andhra Pradesh Government Museum series, No. 6) (Hyderabad, 1986); for chronology, also see D.D. Kosambi, *Indian Numismatics* (Orient Longman, 1981), pp. 140–4.
9. T.V.G., Sastri, *et al., Veerapuram: A Type Site for Cultural Study in the Krishna Valley* (Hyderabad, 1984), ch. 8 and Appendix I.
10. I.K. Sharma, 'Important Numismatic Finds from Duvuuru and Alluru, District Nellore, Andhra Pradesh', *Journal of Academy of Indian Numismatics and Sigillography*, vol. 3 (1980), pp. 12–15.
11. *Indian Archaeology 1980–81—A Review*, pp. 1–2.
12. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit.; see also A. Mitra Sastri, 'Pre-Sātavāhana and Sātavāhana Coinage of the Deccan', Presidential Address, delivered at the

Numismatic Society of India, *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, vol. 44 (1982), pp. 1–16.

13. For finds of coins at Kotalingala and discussions on them, see P.V.P. Sastry, 'Unknown Coins of the Sātavāhanas and Their Predecessors', *Numismatic Digest*, vol. 2, pt. I (1978), pp. 10–21; idem., 'Some More Coins from Kotalingala', ibid., vol. 3, pt. 2 (1979), pp. 17–28; P.L. Gupta, 'Kotalingala Find of Post-Maurya Coins', ibid., vol. 2, pt. 2 (1978), pp. 24–33.
14. T.V.G. Sastri, op. cit.
15. For the term 'local' coins, see J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India* (London, 1936); also A.K. Narain, ed., *Seminar Papers on Local Coins of Northern India, c. 300 BC–AD 300* (Varanasi, 1968).
16. See P.L. Gupta, 'Sātavāhana Coins from Excavations', in A. Mitra Sastri, ed., *Coinage of the Sātavāhanas and Coins from Excavations* (Nagpur, 1972), pp. 128–40.
17. T.V.G Sastri, op. cit.
18. P.V.P. Sastry, op. cit.
19. P.L. Gupta, 'Sātavāhana Coins from Excavations', loc. cit.; idem., 'Coins from Brāhmapuri excavations', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, vol. 21 (1960–1), pp. 38–84.
20. The Raṭhikas are mentioned in Rock Edict V of Aśoka; the Bhojas figure in his XIII Rock Edict, D.C. Sircar, op. cit., pp. 22, 36. The Raṭhikas and Bhojakas are mentioned together in the Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela in the following form: *sava-Raṭhika-Bhojake*, ibid., p. 215.
21. For references, see Himanshu P. Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Sātavāhanas* (Oxford University Press), 1986, pp. 177–9.
22. P.L. Gupta, 'Sātavāhana Coins from Excavations', loc. cit.
23. T.V.G. Sastri, op. cit.
24. Guntupalli (West Godavari district) inscription of *Mahārāja Kaliṅga-Mahiṣakādhipati*, Mahāmeghavāhana Siri Sada; also the Velpuru (Guntur district) inscription of Aira Mānasada of second century AD, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 32, pp. 82–7.
25. Two problems which persistently crop up in studies on the Sātavāhanas relate to (i) chronology and (ii) original homeland. A fresh perspective on the problems may perhaps be adopted by considering the earliest coin series of the Sātavāhanas as comparable to the 'local' inscribed series of the Deccan. The chronology of the earliest Sātavāhana coins may then be comparable with that of other 'local' inscribed series and their distribution pattern would indicate the presence of segments of Sātavāhana-*kula* in different areas of the Deccan before the thrust towards western Deccan where the early records of the 'imperial' family are located.
26. For north India, social evolution down to the emergence of the early historical period has been analysed by judicious juxtaposition of archaeological and literary data; see R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1983); Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State: Social*

Formations in the Mid-First Millennium BC *in the Ganga Valley* (Oxford University Press), 1984.

27. See Himanshu P. Ray, op. cit. This is suggested not only by donations made by the *Mahāraṭhis* and the *Mahābhojas*, but also by cases where the Sātavāhanas had matrimonial relations with them.
28. This expression is used by P.L. Gupta, 'Sātavāhana Coins from Excavations', loc. cit., p. 131.
29. For example, Nasik inscription of year 19 of Vāsiṣṭhiputra Puḷumāvi, D.C. Sircar, op. cit., p. 205.
30. A. Sundara, 'A Two Thousand Year Old Town and Its Architecture in Vadgaon-Madhavpur (Belgaum) in Karnataka', in M.S. Nagaraja Rao, ed., *Madhu* (Delhi, 1981), pp. 87–98.
31. This is the impression one derives from the fact that the earliest Sātavāhana coins at Chandravalli are those of Yajña Sātakarṇi; see P.L. Gupta, 'Sātavāhana Coins from Excavations', loc. cit.; also, *Excavation at Chandravalli (Mysore State)*, issued as a supplement to the Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the year 1929 (Bangalore, 1931), p. 17.
32. T.V.G. Sastri, op. cit.

CHAPTER 4

Geographical Perspectives, Culture Change and Linkages: Some Reflections on Early Punjab*

I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to the organizers of the Punjab History Conference for the honour they have done me by inviting me to preside over the Ancient Section of the present session. I confess that when I first received the invitation to accept the honour, I experienced a feeling of acute diffidence and hesitation, which is natural to one who has not done any sustained research on Punjab. But, in the end, it was impossible to decline an offer so generously made. I have recently been trying to argue that an understanding of processes which lead, through stages which need to be worked out in historical terms, to the formation of regions in India is perhaps more relevant than insisting on the validity of the stereotypes of conventional periodization. Although my own research has so far not specifically related to the history of the Punjab, the justification for my being here today is perhaps that in my view it is essential to understand the wide range of cultural variations within the subcontinent—variations which do not negate the major historical processes operating throughout the country but which nevertheless underline that such major processes interacted with deep layers of cultural antecedents which differed from one segment of space to another. The cultural profiles—and I am not using the term 'culture' in any restricted sense here—which different regions offer are therefore variegated historical products and carry impresses of trans/regional universality as well as distinctiveness.[1]

I understand that in talking about the need for understanding the historical processes—and patterns—of region formation, I am in some ways reiterating the extremely valuable points made by my illustrious colleague

*Presidential Address, *Ancient Section*, *Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference*, 27th session, 1995 (Patiala, 1996).

Professor Romila Thapar almost twenty years back in her Presidential Address to the Punjab History Conference at Patiala;[2] not at all oblivious to the highly blinkered, sectarian approach to regional history, Professor Thapar nevertheless had expressed the following optimistic note in her address: 'Regional history in the context of Indian history could play a . . . catalytic role . . . it would require the analysis of the historical patterns of the region and the relating of these patterns to the generalizations of Indian history.'

However, how does a historian purporting to be working on regional history, define a region? Since I have chosen to speak on a theme which I have titled: 'Geographical Perspectives, Culture Change and Linkages: Some Reflections on Early Punjab', I think it is necessary to clarify in the beginning how the choice of a region, essentially as a spatial unit, in historical research can relate to geographical perspectives. In current historiographical practice, the region of study is almost invariably the state to which the historian belongs, and almost equally invariably, the political boundaries of the state hardly remain static. The scope of an academic enterprise is therefore redefined repeatedly, with corresponding radical modifications in historical generalizations regarding the region, and I assume that no one present here needs to be reminded that Punjab, perhaps more than most regions in India, can be subjected to varieties of definitional arbitrariness unless one proceeds with caution. Second, a region is often unwarrantedly assumed as homogeneous and therefore seen as revealing a homogeneous cultural pattern in history. Culture, even in a regional context, assumes a recognizably distinct shape only through history, and only through different scales of interaction and integration; an assumed homogeneity therefore ignores the spatial–cultural variables which interact within a region and which lie embedded in identities only some traits of which may be, and indeed often are, selectively isolated for representing a region.

There is then the need to look at 'regions' in Indian history from different perspectives and take note of the possible ways in which heuristic constructions of 'regions' can be made for academic purposes.[3] Geographers refer to different notions which relate to the study of regions. One thus has such groupings of 'regions' as 'instituted', 'historical' and so on. In the context of Indian history, the broad categories of 'perennial nuclear regions', 'areas of relative isolation' and 'areas of isolation' have been found to be useful in understanding the origins and paces of historical change in space.[4] There is evidence that in Indian indigenous perceptions too, one segment of space was distinguished from another

not only in terms of their differential locations but also in terms of distinguishable cultural traits.[5] For example, in early Tamil poems, Tamilaham, a region distinguished from other regions, is itself seen as composed of different *tinais* or norms of social behaviour, the norms corresponding to the ecological variations within the region. There were: (i) the region of the hills, (ii) the pastoral tract, (iii) the littoral, (iv) the riverine–agrarian region, and (v) the uncultivated dry region.[6] The regional perspective then derives from the way one chooses the combination of variables to constitute the spatial unit of study, and that the choice is not simple is implied in the following statement: 'To a large extent, the difficulty is conceptual. That is, delimiting the distribution of some elements of related elements which distinguish one segment of the time–space continuum from another requires both adequate and relevant distinguishing elements chosen to constitute the region. The adequacy or relevance of the elements, according to which a region is defined, are related to and are alone justified by the problem at hand.'[7] In other words, for the purpose of historical research as well as other intellectual enterprises, a 'region' has to be a careful 'construct' which, even then, can be open to debate; it is not pre-constructed for the historian.

II

With the above comments as a kind of backdrop, I would like to submit three propositions concerning early Punjab for your consideration. These propositions are not based on any sustained research on my part but are based on an exploratory investigation into a substantial corpus of archaeological, literary, numismatic and other types of material which is available on early Punjab. All that I am attempting to do, with a good deal of hesitation but taking advantage of the opportunity you have given me, is to understand certain patterns which the available data seem to suggest. The first proposition is that the continuity revealed by sequences of archaeological cultures, particularly in the upper *doabs* and the submontane region of the Punjab before the middle of the first millennium BC represents the process of the formation of the early cultural pattern of the Punjab as well as the beginning of its linkages. Punjab of the early historical period, in other words, can hardly be understood without any reference to these early culture stages. My second proposition is that throughout the early historical phase in the Punjab *gaṇa-saṃgha* formations, which may be assumed to have had links with the preceding

archaeological culture stages, remained dominant, despite a substantial expansion of Punjab's linkages during this phase and even possible changes in the structure of *gaṇa-saṃgha* formations. In my understanding, this will explain why, despite being a key region of the early Vedic tradition, the social norms of the *janapadas* or the *gaṇa-saṃghas* of the Punjab came in for severe attack from Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy. My third proposition is that the beginnings of monarchical state formation in the hills mark a shift from the earlier dominant pattern and open up, perhaps more effectively than before, new areas for the existing network of linkages. I shall now take up these points separately and highlight the major categories of empirical evidence that relate to them.

III

The early history of the Punjab is generally seen either in terms of the centres of Harappan civilization which are located within the territorial limits of the Punjab or in terms of what is still considered as a fallout of 'Aryan' invasions which colonized the regions of seven 'Sindhus' including the Punjab. A methodological departure from either of these views would be to trace the different stages of the formation of human settlements in the Punjab, through different technological stages and to see whether evidence relating to the early historical period reflects a continuity from what is available for the proto-historic period. My own impression is that in so far as settlement history is concerned, there was continuity which can be traced from the pre-Harappan phase, through different phases of Harappan and local cultures to such later culture phases as Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware, although the assumed continuity between the proto-historic phase in the Punjab and the subsequent phases will remain, at the present state of research, somewhat tenuous. The other—and rather vital—point related to what has been mentioned above is that it is somewhat pointless to take a current political unit to correspond to a cultural region, and the exercise that I shall be undertaking on different phases of early Punjab will essentially relate to areas for which evidence is so far available.

Early Punjab was in any case in the making in different phases through what may be considered as the total span of Harappan culture, and it is necessary in the beginning to understand the pattern of distribution of settlements relating to it. From the perspective of regional geography, the following points are worth taking note of when considering the

Harappan context in the Punjab. First, Harappa, a major site of this culture, stands in a location of puzzling isolation in west Punjab.[8] The only two Harappan sites in its vicinity, Chak Purbane Syal and Jalilpur, do not constitute a cluster of sites, and despite one view that Harappa was situated within an extensive zone of about 6600 square km of prime agricultural land,[9] the hypothesis that there may have been a relatively large number of pastoralists in the area in Harappan times may be considered as valid.[10] Harappa is thus considered to have been situated on some kind of a 'frontier', which separated 'two different modes of subsistence'. It is further characterized as a 'Gateway city', different from a central place city, and the following suggestion has been made with regard to the city's linkages: 'The materials known at the Harappan sites that could have been procured along this network would include lapis lazuli from Badakshan (via Gomal valley), deodar wood from Himalayan temperate forests, pine woods from Himalayan ranges east of Kashmir, elm wood from subtropical Himalayas east of Dehra Dun, copper and steatite from Zhob valley, placer gold from upper reaches of the Chenab and perhaps copper from scattered deposits in Shimla and Kangra regions.'[11]

The nucleus of settlements related to Harappan culture in the Punjab, of which the multi-culture site of Ropar (Ropar district) appears to have been the node, will then have to be looked for in another area, that is, the upper interfluvial, submontane region. The chain of pre-Harappan and Harappan sites was, in the region, 'located in the valley of various *choes* and *nadis* like Sirhind Nadi, Markanda and Pahlavi'.[12] While the obvious linkage of sites was more intense with the dense concentration of Harappan sites along the Ghaggar–Hakra system, a closer look, based on an estimate published in 1992, will provide a better idea of the settlement profile of the Punjab at this proto-historic phase.

Two important points seem to emerge from Table 4.1. One is that there is a distinct concentration of sites in Ludhiana and Patiala districts in the late Harappan phase. Second, and from the point of view of the crystallization of a human habitation zone this is important, there is a steep increase in the number of sites in the late Harappan phase. If we go by the estimate given in Table 4.1, the number of sites went up from 26 to 37 from the pre-Harappan to the Harappan phase and from 37 to 130 in the late Harappan phase. This sharp increase in the number of sites also distinctly suggests an upward demographic trend in the region—a region whose geographical limits are indicated in the locations of the sites between 29° 44'–32° 14' N and 74° 15' E and 76° 46' E.

Table 4.1

District-wise distribution of number of sites[13]

Pre-Harappan		*Harappan*		*Late Harappan*	
Kapurthala	2	Amritsar	1	Gurdaspur	9
Ropar	2	Kapurthala	2	Amritsar	3
Sangrur	6	Jalandhar	1	Hoshiarpur	2
Ludhiana	2	Patiala	4	Kapurthala	2
Faridkot	2	Ludhiana	4	Patiala	37
Bhatinda	11	Faridkot	1	Sangrur	9
Ferozepur	1	Bhatinda	14	Ludhiana	29
		Ropar	3	Faridkot	3
		Sangrur	5	Bhatinda	10
		Ferozepur	1		
Total	= 26	Total	= 36	Total	= 104

The period extending from the middle of the third millennium BC to almost the first half of the first millennium BC, which included the different phases of the Harappan culture, also experienced the emergence of such bronze age local cultures as the essentially rural Bara culture with obvious contacts with mature Harappan sites like Ropar located nearby.[14] Chronologically and technologically, the settlements of the phase that succeeded and perhaps to some extent overlapped with the final phase of the Harappan culture are represented by Painted Grey Ware and Grey Ware sites; the distribution of these settlements, district-wise, is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2[15]

Amritsar	22	Kapurthala	7	Chandigarh	1
Bhatinda	3	Ludhiana	32	Ferozepur	1
Patiala	59	Gurdaspur	15	Ropar	37
Hoshiarpur	4	Sangrur	12	Jalandhar	24
		Faridkot	1		

With the heaviest concentration of sites in Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Patiala and Ropar districts, the total number of sites is 218, and this again is indicative of a sharp rise in the number of settlements, with distinct alignment with sites in the Indo-Gangetic divide where too there

is a density and hierarchy of Painted Grey Ware sites. These sites, in any case, extend also over the upper Ganga basin and eastern Rajasthan, and suggest greater intensity of proto-historic Punjab's linkage with the upper Ganga basin through the Indo-Gangetic divide at this culture stage.[16]

The early historic phase of eastern Punjab, the beginning of which—as in the Ganga basin—may be placed in the middle of the first millennium BC, is again represented by sites also showing uneven distribution district-wise; this is suggested by Table 4.3:

Table 4.3[17]

Amritsar	35	Bhatinda	32
Hoshiarpur	12	Gurdaspur	32
Ludhiana	33	Patiala	43
Ropar	9	Sangrur	13
Jalandhar	20	Kapurthala	20

The total number of sites shows a marginal increase from the Painted Grey Ware and Grey Ware phases represented by Table 4.2, but together tables 4.1–4.3 very strongly suggest that from the point of view of the formation of early Punjab as a cultural region, with differentially distributed human settlements, the late Harappan and Painted Grey Ware and Grey Ware phases were very crucial. Second, if one goes by the distribution map of Painted Grey Ware sites, and later of sites yielding Northern Black Polished Ware, the plains of the Punjab became increasingly integrated with the cultures of the Ganga basin from the late proto-historic phase onward.

IV

How does one match the image of early Punjab, generally derived from literary texts and other types of historical record, with the archaeological evidence briefly mentioned above? Punjab is generally seen as a region of constant interaction and movements—like a canvas forever changing colour as swift brushstrokes sweep across it with rhythmic regularity. It is thus seen as a part of the *Saptasindhu* (i.e., seven rivers) horizon of the Ṛg-Vedic Aryans who subsequently moved to the Ganga–Yamuna basin or fanned out elsewhere;[18] in later periods, what are seen as major events are: Achaemenid occupation followed by the tumultuous march by the troops of Alexander;[19] the inroads of the Indo-Greeks, the Scythians, the Parthians, the Kuṣāṇas, and still later, the Hūṇas.[20] The archaeological

evidence ought to put this picture in a more proper perspective by juxtaposing the ever-moving brushstrokes with the pattern of cultural evolution suggested by the succession of archaeological stages in the Punjab. I am by no means attempting a happy correlation between early literary evidence bearing on the Punjab with archaeology,[21] but I would like to make the plea in strong terms that historians should at least make some effort to understand early Punjab in terms of local cultural evolution rather than relegating it to one of history's eternal 'march' regions.

I would like to reiterate the proposition made above in this context to say that literary evidence seems to suggest a transition from *jana* or tribal to *janapada*/territorial and *gaṇa-saṃgha* (loosely translated as 'republican' or 'oligarchical' and often also as 'tribal') form of society in major parts of the Punjab in the time-span represented by the *Ṛg-Veda* at one end and the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* by Pāṇini at the other. The time-span, roughly, would extend from the close of the second millennium BC to the middle of the first millennium BC. Archaeologically, the time-span would correspond to phases which are present also in the Indo-Gangetic divide and the upper Ganga basin. The literary evidence, however, points to two different ways in which societies in the upper Punjab plains and the Indo-Gangetic divide on the one hand and in the Ganga basin on the other were shaping up towards the beginning of the early historical period; specific reference to this will be made a little later.

Some of the *janas* mentioned in the *Ṛg-Veda* obviously related to the Punjab; although their distribution pattern is not satisfactorily ascertainable, they are sometimes associated with Paruṣṇī, Asiknī, Śutudri, Vipāś, Sarasvatī—all rivers of the Punjab and the Indo-Gangetic divide, and of course these rivers corresponded to the eastern frontier of the *janas* at this stage. Ṛg-Vedic *janas* like the Anus, Druhyus, Pūrus, Yadus, Turvaśas, Bharatas and so on were associated essentially with the region of the Punjab and the Indo-Gangetic divide, and others like the Pakhtas, Bhalānasas, Viṣāṇins, Śivas may have been associated with the region further west.[22] And, of course, the most important 'political' event of the *Ṛg-Veda*, namely, the battle of ten kings, in which the Bharatas emerged victorious, took place on the banks of Paruṣṇī or the Ravi.

The later Vedic evidence bearing on the *janas* can be seen to relate to two important changes. One, some of the Ṛg-Vedic *janas* like the Pūrus, Bharatas, Kṛvis and so on are found associated with new geographical horizons, suggesting movement, and, further, with emerging *janapadas*.[23] There thus emerged Kuru, Pañcāla and other *janapadas* in the upper-middle Ganga basin where the sequence of successive archaeological

cultures forms an essential backdrop to the process of the formation of these *janapadas.*[24] Second, these ethnic movements may be taken to have accelerated the pace of linkages, which existed from the late Harappan phase, between the Punjab and the Ganga–Yamuna basin. In the Punjab, the fact that *janas* like the Pūrus, Śivas and others are found figuring in the early historical sources would suggest that here too the emergence of the cultural pattern of the early historical period will have to be understood by situating the references to different *janas* against the backdrop of the sequence of archaeological cultures discussed earlier. During the first half of the first millennium BC, and to the time that Alexander's invading army came to Punjab, the process of *janapada* formation in the Punjab plains can be clearly seen in literary references from the time of the later Vedic texts. A detailed survey of the *janapadas* or of the stages of their growth is beyond the scope of this address; only two points may be highlighted here. One, the major *janapadas* such as Gandhāra in western Punjab, Kekaya (between Gandhāra and the Beas) and Madra (to the west of the Ravi) which are first noticed in later Vedic texts[25] have to be considered along with many other *janapadas* which, on the basis of Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the annals of Alexander's campaigns, and, later, epigraphic and numismatic evidence, would correspond to the category of *gaṇa-saṃgha*. In the formation of the *janapadas*, the pattern at this stage is comparable to what was emerging in the Ganga basin, though one must at the same time note that at the time of the Buddha, or roughly the middle of the first millennium BC, the area of concentration of the major *janapadas* (*mahājanapadas*) was the Ganga basin, the only major *janapada* of the northwest being Gandhāra.[26] This should suggest a pattern of growing contrast in the trajectories of early historical developments in the Ganga basin and in the Punjab plains. Second, the growth of linkages between the Punjab *janapadas* and those of the Ganga basin in the beginning of the early historical phase is evident from literary texts; the major communication line along which spatial and cultural interaction took place was *Uttarāpatha*, and although the details of the line are difficult to reconstruct, the intensity of interaction is indeed suggested by references to caravan merchants moving from Vārāṇasi and Rājagṛha, through Aggalapura and Sākala to far-off Takṣaśilā (Taxila in Gandhāra), to journeys undertaken by students of medicine and statecraft, again from Rājagṛha to Takṣaśilā and to itineraries of princes, such as Bharata in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[27] Even at this early stage, this was not a one-way movement; it has been suggested that perhaps the galaxy of philosophers who adorned the court of Janaka, the ruler of Mithilā in north Bihar,

included a representative from Madra in the Punjab.[28] However, despite this interaction, in the image of the cultural regions constructed by Brāhmaṇical texts, *Uttarāpatha*, which included the region of the Indo-Gangetic divide, the Punjab plains and beyond were distinct from Madhyadeśa which was where the Brāhmaṇical norms were followed. In the eleventh century, *Uttarāpatha* was defined as a region beyond Pṛthūdaka or Pehowa in the Karnal district of Haryana.[29] This is curious because the 'holy land' of Brahmāvartta, the core region for the genesis of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, became marginal in the Brāhmaṇical texts of the early historical period, and even some *janapadas* of the Punjab, such as Bāhlīka and Madra, came to be condemned in Brāhmaṇical literature as licentious and self-willed.[30]

Our contention is that this denunciation by Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy was due to the dominance of the *gaṇa-saṃgha* form of social organization in the Punjab in the early historical period, although it is sometimes explained in terms of the existence of *strīrājya, strīvāhya* or *nārīviṣaya*, all suggesting rule by women, in north-western India.[31] The evidence for the existence of the *gaṇa-saṃghas* in the Punjab, in which society was dominated by *rājanyas* or *āyudhajīvī kṣatriyas*, and not by the Brāhmaṇical ideology of monarchy, is indeed very strong. In the list of Pāṇini's *janapadas*,[32] one comes across Gandhāra, Kekaya, Madra, Vāhika, Uśīnara, Ambaṣṭha, Trigartta, Kālakūṭa, Śālva, Udumbara, Tilakhala, Madrakara, Yugandhara, Bodha and others, which were distributed in different parts of the Punjab and the Indo-Gangetic divide and which were dominated by major *rājanya* groups and their sub-sections after whom they were named. Pāṇini's four categories of *āyudhajīvī saṃghas* included the *saṃghas* of Vāhika or Punjab. Considered the most advanced among the *āyudhajīvī saṃgha* and located, on the basis of the *Karṇaparva* of the *Mahābhārata* between 'the Indus to the Beas and the Sutlej', were the *āyudhajīvī saṃghas* of the Yaudheyas, Kṣudrakas and the Mālavas. The historians of Alexander's campaigns excellently supplement what is available in Pāṇini, and despite their disputed locations, the regions associated with 'Elder Porus', the Gandaris, Adraistai, Kathaioi, Phegelus, Siboi, Agalassoi, Oxydrakoi, Malloi and so on, will have to be located within the confines of early historical Punjab.[33] In fact, it has been shown convincingly by a number of historians that the 'tribes' mentioned by historians of Alexander's campaigns have indeed to be identified with those mentioned by Pāṇini and figuring also in other early Indian sources.[34]

H.C. Raychaudhuri, one of the pioneers of research on early Indian

political history, was of the view that it was the decline of Achaemenid power in northwest India which led to its parcellization into 'innumerable kingdoms, hyparchies and republics'.[35] In view of the sequence of early cultures in the Punjab revealed by its archaeology, I feel that a complete reversal of this approach is required. I have already mentioned that the process of *janapada* formation, either in the form of a major one like Gandhāra, or in the form of its many *gaṇa-saṃghas* was a crucial historical process in early historical Punjab as in other regions and that the roots of this formation have to be traced to its archaeological past. Let me illustrate this further by giving an example. The Malloi of Alexander's historians, unhesitatingly identified with the *āyudhajīvī kṣatriya saṃgha* of Mālava of Pāṇini by modern scholars, were obviously located in the Punjab: 'Early Punjab association of the Mālavas is attested by the fact that today a large part of southern Punjab (lying between 29° and 31° N and 74° 30' and 77° E) comprising the districts of Ferozepur and Ludhiana and the old states of Patiala, Jind, Nabha, Faridkot, and Malerkotla is known as Malwa. The Punjabi dialect used in the region extending from Ferozepur to Bhatinda is also known as Malwai.'[36] If the growing concentration of archaeological sites down to the historical period in the districts mentioned above, as has been shown in our tables, is any indication, then the prehistory of *janapada* formation in the Punjab—and not of that of Mālava alone—will have to be looked into from a fresh perspective.

It is by no means being suggested that the *janapadas* or the *āyudhajīvī saṃghas*, once they were formed, did not go through any perceptible change. Indeed they did, and there is abundance of material on how broad historical changes in north India in the period between *c.* BC 200 and AD 300 substantially affected different segments of the region of the Punjab, including the history of the *gaṇa-saṃghas*. Here, again, a detailed probing is impossible to undertake in this essay, and I would like to limit myself to making three points. One, the emergence of early historical urbanization in the Punjab, which of course pre-dated the Mauryas, and the major manifestation of which was in the three, or more, cities of Taxila, has to be seen in relation to the total number of early historical sites reported in the region. In other words, the emergence of new urban features in some old settlement centres such as Ropar or of new urban centres will have to be related to new thrusts in economy which characterized the period. It has been mentioned earlier that according to an available estimate the total number of early historical settlements in eastern Punjab may be put around two hundred fifty, whereas the urban

centres of the region so far mentioned would be only about a dozen;[37] this should suggest a growing hierarchical pattern among settlements, deriving from the process of convergence of resources at a limited number of centres and of the emergence of nodes. Second, following from this, it would appear that even the *āyudhajīvī saṃghas*, traditionally associated with the use of arms as the major means of their subsistence, were now a part of the vast network of commerce which characterized the economy of north India in general in the Indo-Greek, Scytho-Parthian and Kuṣāṇa times. The discovery of thousands of Yaudheya copper coins and of coin moulds from Rohtak in Haryana and from Sunet in the Ludhiana district of the Punjab is testimony to this;[38] to me, what is equally important is the minting of silver coins, closely resembling some silver coins of the Indo-Greek rulers by such *gaṇa-saṃghas* as Audumbara and others, not only using suitably modified Indo-Greek symbols and weight standard, but also both Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts as well.[39] What is therefore significant about post-Mauryan pre-Gupta Punjab is not only the association of major powers like the Indo-Greeks, the Scytho-Parthians and the Kuṣāṇas with the region, but also an overall change in the political–economic scenario and an opening up of new networks of communication in which the structures of early *gaṇa-saṃghas* too started undergoing processes of change. Let me refer a little more to the Audumbaras, identical with Pāṇini's Audumbara mentioned above, to elucidate this point further. The coins of the Audumbaras, issued in different types and bearing the names of rulers belonging to the *gaṇa-saṃgha*, have been found at Pathankot along with coins of Zoilus, Gondophares and Kaṇiṣka; Audumbara coins have also been found in Kangra, Hoshiarpur and Gurdaspur districts, and on the basis of the distribution map of their coins, John Allan long ago located them between the upper Sutlej and the Ravi.[40] The Audumbaras were thus located on a nodal point of several routes: one oriented north-northwestward through Agrodaka (Agroha), Rohitaka (Rohtak), Sākala (Sialkot) to Taxila and beyond; the other extended to Kashmir; and, generally, the Audumbaras in this period seem to have commanded openings to several Himalayan valleys.[41] The interaction with and process of extension into Himalayan valleys had important consequences for the future, but for the moment, let us consider the third point suggested by the distribution map of the *gaṇa-saṃghas* of this period. It is obvious that by now the *gaṇa-saṃghas* were no longer a political organization to be found in the Ganga basin or in sub-Himalayan Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, but, as we have seen, they were very much in existence in the Indo-Gangetic divide (dominated as it was by the

Yaudheyas), in the upper valleys of the Punjab, in several pockets of Rajasthan to which such stocks from the Punjab as the Mālavas and the Śibis had moved, and in the Himalayas extending to Garhwal.[42] The *gaṇa-saṃghas* were obviously going through a process of change and many of them are mentioned not only as *gaṇas* but distinctly as *janapadas* as well. However, whatever their network of linkages—which was indeed quite extensive—their distribution map corresponded to a zone which was distinct both from Gandhāran northwest and the Ganga basin.

V

It is indeed difficult, at the present state of our knowledge, to dwell on the chronology of further metamorphosis of the *gaṇa-saṃgha* tradition in the region of the Punjab. There was, however, another noticeable trend of change in the region, with of course a different spatial focus, from the close of the early historical period, that is, from about the sixth-seventh century AD, and this change is seen in the beginning of dynastic rule of several monarchical families, leading to the formation mainly of the 'Punjab Hill States' of Darvābhisāra, Trigartta (Jalandhar), Kira (Kangra), Chamba, Kulu and so on.[43] I cannot take up the process of the formation of these states for any detailed discussion; I can only briefly mention the main points of interest associated with their emergence. Source material for the early history of these states is decidedly very inadequate; but they do point to the appearance of two features which are found to be associated with the process of monarchical state formation elsewhere as well. One was the beginning of the construction of genealogy or *vaṃśāvalī*, and as is evident from the process of state formation elsewhere, genealogy construction was very perceptibly associated with Brāhmaṇical legitimation of monarchical power from the Gupta and early medieval period onward.[44] The *vaṃśāvalīs*, of course of varying chronology and with layers of encrustrations that went into the compilations of their latest versions, are available for the hill states as well and for cross-checking of the information contained in them. In the case of the hill state of Chamba in the upper Ravi, the history of the Mūṣaṇa Vaṃśa, known from a variety of sources, may be dated as early as the seventh-eighth centuries.[45] The origins of the other states may not be so early, but as mentioned earlier, they too share this feature of state formation with Chamba. The second new feature associated with state formation in the hill areas was the practice of donation of land to Brāhmaṇas and temples[46]—a practice which was becoming widespread throughout the Indian subcontinent from the Gupta period onward.[47]

The features specified above in relation to the process of state form-

ation bring me to reconsidering a few crucial comments which have been made about the early history of the Punjab region at this phase. There is thus the statement to the effect: 'Gupta rule appears to have made scant impression on the Punjab.'[48] It is perhaps true that the Gupta ruler Samudragupta's conquest of Āryāvartta in the fourth century, which resulted in the dissolution of a number of *gaṇa-saṃghas* of north India, did not directly affect the upper Punjab plains, but the Gupta phase, more than direct Gupta rule, did trigger off a spurt of state formation in the frontier region of the hills in which Brāhmaṇical ideology was an integral part.[49] Following from this, one should also perhaps ponder once more over the puzzle also pointed out by Professor Thapar: 'One of the most puzzling problems in the latter part of the first millennium AD, is the surprising absence of land grant inscriptions from the Punjab plains.'[50] Professor Thapar attributes this either to the 'low priority for agriculture or else an agrarian and administrative system which did not require the kind of changes taking place in neighbouring regions'.[51] Taking my cue from these suggestions, I would venture to suggest that the explanation will have to be looked for in the strong *gaṇa-saṃgha* tradition of the Punjab plains, which did not provide much space for the Brāhmaṇical mode of monarchical legitimation. One may recall here that during the time of the Buddha, around the middle of the first millennium BC, the monarchical states of Kosala and Magadha, in Uttar Pradesh and south Bihar respectively, had a number of villages gifted to the Brāhmaṇas by the monarchs; by contrast, all land in the *gaṇa-saṃghas* of the Vajjis and others was held by the Khattiyas or Kṣatriyas, Brāhmaṇa beneficiaries being totally absent in them.[52] In the Punjab plains too the strong legacy of the *gaṇa-saṃgha* form of socio-political organization may have continued well beyond the Gupta period, while the hills of the Punjab were going through a different experience altogether.

What I have attempted to present above are essentially certain ideas which derive from patterns of culture change in early India in general; the distinct trajectories of early Punjab's culture change and the ways in which its spatial segments developed special profiles may be profitably analysed by placing the available disparate data against these broad patterns. Punjab's regional history and the general processes of Indian history were not mutually exclusive, but both are better understood in terms of the diversities as well the dynamism of linkages rather than through the oft-repeated notion of 'centre and periphery'.

I once again thank the organizers of the Punjab History Conference for inviting me to preside over this section and I thank you all for giving me a patient hearing.

Notes and References

1. See 'The Making of Early Medieval India', in B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994).
2. Romila Thapar, 'The Scope and Significance of Regional History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 361–76.
3. For the evolution of the concept of Punjab in history, see the perceptive comments by J.S. Grewal, 'Inaugural Address', Punjab History Conference, Punjabi University, Patiala, 28 March 1995.
4. For bibliographical references, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *A Survey of Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1984), ch. 2; see also the collection of essays edited by R.I. Crane, *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study* (Duke University, 1966).
5. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit.
6. See, for example, 'The Landscapes in Ancient Tamil Literature', in G.D. Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities in Western India*, translated from the German by Anne Feldhaus (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989).
7. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1980), p. 30, n.
8. Gregory L. Possehl, ed., *Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (Delhi, 1982), p. 15.
9. Marcia Fentress, 'From Jhelum to Yamuna: City and Settlement in the Second and Third Millennium BC', in G.L. Possehl, op. cit., pp. 245–60.
10. Possehl, op. cit.
11. Shereen Ratnagar, 'The Location of Harappa', in Possehl, op. cit., pp. 261–4.
12. B.K. Thapar, 'The Harappan Civilization: Some Reflections on Its Environments and Resources and Their Exploitation', Possehl, op. cit., pp. 3–13.
13. Madhu Bala, *Archaeology of Punjab* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 52–61.
14. Y.D. Sharma, 'Harappan Complex on the Sutlej (India)', in Possehl, op. cit., pp. 141–65; Madhu Bala, op. cit.; Madhu Bala, 'A Survey of the Protohistoric Investigations in Punjab and the Emergent Picture', *Indian Anthropologist*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1978), pp. 89–117.
15. Madhu Bala, *Archaeology of Punjab*, pp. 62–9.
16. For distribution of sites, see Marcia Fentress, op. cit.; also R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1983), chs. 4–5 and map facing p. 69.
17. Madhu Bala, op. cit., pp. 101–9.
18. See 'Aryan Occupation in India', in H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Studies in Indian Antiquities* 2nd edition (University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1958), pp. 53–62; R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Vedic Age* (London, 1951), ch. 13.

19. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* 6th edition (University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1958), ch. 3; R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, 3rd impression (Bombay, 1960), ch. 3; S. Chattopadhyaya, *The Achaemenids and India* (Delhi, 1974).
20. For survey of the political history of north India of the relevant period, the following publications may be consulted: K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed., *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 2 (The Mauryas and Sātavāhanas) (Calcutta, 1957), chs. 4–9; R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, chs. 7–9; B.N. Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the Kushana Empire* (Calcutta, 1988).
21. For an interesting attempt to study Vedic, particularly Ṛg-Vedic material, in relation to evidence of archaeology, see R.N. Nandi, 'Archaeology and the *Ṛg-Veda*', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 16, nos. 1–2 (1989–90), pp. 35–79. The approach of this essay is however different from the hypothesis that I have tried to advance in the present address.
22. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Studies in Indian Antiquities*; also D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956), chs. 4 and 5.
23. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, chs. 2–3; D.D. Kosambi, op. cit., ch. 5.
24. See R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, ch. 6.
25. H.C. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., ch. 2.
26. The most comprehensive treatment of the *mahājanapadas* is to be found in H.C. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., ch. 3, section I.
27. For an idea of the different routes, see B. Srivastava, *Trade and Commerce in Ancient India* (Varanasi, 1968), passim.
28. H.C. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., pp. 56, 58.
29. Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, 17th *adhyāya*; see N.N. Chakravarti, *Rājāśekhara O Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* (in Bengali) (Santiniketan, 1960), pp. 144, 270.
30. R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 36–7.
31. Ibid. Note, in this connection, the interesting comments of Buddha Prakash, 'It is remarkable that, whereas the Madras are bitterly denounced in the *Mahābhārata*, not a word is said against the Mālavas . . . Evidently it appears that, with the passage of time, the Mālavas, particularly in eastern Punjab, had fallen in with the orthodox Brāhmaṇical ideals of life.' Buddha Prakash, *Glimpses of Ancient Punjab* (Patiala, 1983), pp. 39–40. Obviously, the attempt here is to show that some *gaṇa-saṃghas* of Punjab conformed to Brāhmaṇical norms.

D.C. Sircar, on the other hand, attributes Brāhmaṇical attitude to the occupation of '*Uttarāpatha* by foreigners beginning with the Iranians and Greeks', D.C. Sircar, *Iranians and Greeks in Ancient Punjab* (Patiala, 1973), p. 56.

32. For a comprehensive treatment of the material in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, see V.S. Agrawala, *India as known to Pāṇini: A Study of the Cultural Material in the Aṣṭādhyāyī* (University of Lucknow, Lucknow, 1953), chs. 2 and 7.
33. H.C. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., ch. 3.
34. Ibid.; see also K.K. Dasgupta, *A Tribal History of Ancient India: A Numismatic Approach* (Calcutta, 1973), passim.
35. H.C. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 244.
36. K.K. Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 113.
37. For brief references to the archaeological material at the major early historical centres in the Punjab, see R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 14–19; Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Early Indian Cities* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995); Madhu Bala, *Archaeology of Punjab*; for a recent synthesis of the material on Taxila, see A.H. Dani, *The Historic City of Taxila* (Tokyo, 1986).
38. K.K. Dasgupta, op. cit., ch. 14.
39. Ibid., chs. 4, 5, 6.
40. John Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India* (British Musuem), reprinted (London, 1967), lxxxvii.
41. K.K. Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 68.
42. For the Mālavas and Śibis in Rajasthan, known through their coins, see Allan, op. cit., civ–cvi; cxiii–civ; for the Kuṇindas whose coins have been found in such different locations as 'the foot of the Siwalik hills between the Jumna and the Sutlej and the territory between the upper courses of the Beas and the Sutlej' and the 'Garhwal districts in U.P.', K.K. Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 90.
43. R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Age of Imperial Kanauj* (Bombay, 1955), p. 121. Emergence of hill states in Kumaun Garhwal region is also traced to the sixth century, ibid., pp. 122–4.
44. See B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, chs. 1 and 8 for relevant bibliographical references.
45. J. Hutchinson and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of the Punjab Hill States*, vol. I (reprinted Shimla, 1982), pp. 2–3; J. Ph. Vogel, *Antiquities of the Chamba State*, part I (Calcutta, 1911); Romila Thapar, 'The Mouse in the Ancestry', in S.D. Joshi, ed., *Amritadhara* (Professor R.N. Dandekar Felicitation Volume) (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 429–30; also D.N. Jha, 'State Formation in Early Medieval Chamba', ed., *Society and Ideology in India: Essays in Honour of Professor R.S. Sharma* (Delhi, 1996), pp. 125–34.
46. With reference to donations of land to Brāhmaṇas and temples, Hutchinson and Vogel mention 'an almost uninterrupted series from the sixth century down to the present time', op. cit., p. 5.
47. See D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy* (Delhi, 1965); R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, c. 300–1200* (University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1965).
48. Romila Thapar, 'The Scope and Significance of Regional History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, p. 368.

49. For brief outlines of histories of hill states, see R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Age of Imperial Kanauj,* ch. 5; Hutchinson and J. Ph. Vogel, op. cit., D.N. Jha, op. cit.
50. Romila Ṭhapar, op. cit., p. 369.
51. Ibid., pp. 369–70.
52. The distinction between monarchical states and the *gaṇa-saṃghas* in terms of the presence of *brahmadeya* villages in the former and the exclusive land rights of the Kṣatriyas in the latter has been effectively brought out by Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987), ch. 3.

CHAPTER 5

Urban Centres in Early Bengal: Archaeological Perspectives*

I

It may be made clear at the outset that this essay is not intended to be a detailed survey of the urban centres of early Bengal. There are genuine methodological as well as other difficulties which confront one wishing to undertake such a survey. Briefly, the difficulties are of the nature of: (a) absence of much meaningful discussion launched so far on the phenomenon of urbanism in a regional context, and (b) uneven reportings as well as distribution of archaeological material relating to early Bengal. The present venture may thus at best be considered to be of an exploratory nature, and it has to start by stating the assumptions which characterize the attempt which, in any case, will focus more on the phenomenon of urbanization in the early historical phase and only marginally on the early medieval, pre-Islamic phase.[1]

The first point that may be made is that a study of urbanization in early Bengal needs to be located within the framework of early urbanization in the entire subcontinent, and it thus cannot be viewed as a phenomenon unique to the region alone. Bengal, like many regions peripheral to the middle and upper Ganga basin in which early historical urbanization had its genesis,[2] experienced early urbanization through what may be called the process of 'secondary urbanization'.[3] Second, many of the cultural elements which characterize early historical urbanization elsewhere are present in the context of urbanization in early Bengal as well. These points make it imperative to invoke, though not necessarily subscribe to, the dominant notions in the historiography of urbanization in early India for the purpose of this essay.

In addition, it is necessary also to spell out the general methodological problems involved in a study of this kind. The primary query, which is

*Reprinted from *Pratna-Samiksha*, 2 and 3 (1993–4), Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta.

not unique to the study of pre-modern urbanization in India alone, is: what is urban? The uncertainty of definition is almost endemic, and even if one takes Europe, on which the tradition of historiography is decidedly extremely rich, the uncertainty is present not only in the context of classical European urban centres[4], but it characterizes even sixteenth–seventeenth century France.[5] Even contemporary perceptions were not always altogether clear about the status—urban or otherwise—which an individual human settlement would have been entitled to.[6]

It is not surprising then that archaeologists and historians in India seem somewhat at a loss to provide either a satisfactory explanation of the genesis of early historical urban centres or a definition of what is urban. Thus, the debate whether the introduction of iron in the Ganga valley was a necessary precondition for early historical urbanization still continues.[7] Similarly, the criteria for determining what is urban range from the size of a settlement and the consideration of settlement hierarchy[8] to the quality of the material culture revealed by the objects yielded by a settlement site.[9] These criteria are again not constant; they keep on varying and are suitably modified to fit the type of hypotheses which are advanced.

The resultant lack of clarity has found expression in at least one historiographical trend. It is that irrespective of whether the territorial unit of study is the entire subcontinent[10] or a macro region like Bengal,[11] attempts to analyse urbanization generally end up by treating almost all excavated sites as undifferentiatedly urban.[12] The problem of sorting out what may be considered as urban or even of re-examining the usual set of criteria is made more acute by the fact that most early historic sites have been excavated vertically or in the form of laying trial trenches in order to determine their cultural sequence, and thus excavation reports provide inadequate data regarding the total settlement configuration of a site.

It is nevertheless necessary to arrive at even a loose kind of understanding of what may be considered urban before one can attempt to write an essay on the phenomenon of urbanization in a region. It has already been underlined that the pattern of urbanization in early Bengal will have to be understood with reference to the broad features of early historical urbanization as a pan-Indian phenomenon. Thus, despite the possibility that a particular region may present elements which are peculiar to it, one may begin by looking for general features which figure in discussions on early Indian urbanization.

Although urban centres are mentioned in literature and other written

records, the accent, in discussions on early Indian urbanization, has been on urban centres as archaeological sites, and in the archaeological context, the difference between urban and non-urban may imply a corresponding difference in the structure of settlements. Archaeologists have begun taking hierarchy of settlements to reflect hierarchy of functions of individual settlements.[13] At the same time, it needs to be remembered that hierarchy does not relate to the dichotomy between urban and rural settlements alone but can be present in both categories. The presence of hierarchy among settlement sites, which is gauged by archaeologists sometimes in terms of settlement size alone,[14] cannot by itself, therefore, be a criterion for urbanization.

Since the size of a settlement site cannot by itself suggest either urbanism or its urban/non-urban character, one way of looking at the problem, in a situation where some information is available on the structure of a settlement, is to examine whether space in a settlement is differentiated and heterogeneous. In other words, a settlement site, in order to qualify as an urban centre, must have, in addition to residential buildings, space utilized in other ways: for construction of roads, artisanal areas, religious shrines and community spaces of other types and so on. This will conversely imply that an archaeological site, however imposing it may have been, cannot be treated as an urban centre if it reveals only one dominant function.[15] Nalanda of Gupta and post-Gupta Bihar cannot thus be regarded as an urban centre, but Taxila of early historical northwest can certainly be regarded as one. Similarly, we would not consider the imposing *vihāra* site of Paharpur as an urban centre and would, for the same reason, also exclude, at the present state of our knowledge, the extensive series of Mainamati sites in south-eastern Bengal from the purview of our discussion.[16] The point, however, need not be stretched too far since even in cases where a site is predominantly a settlement site, its settlement features remain only inadequately known.

In many known contexts, including those in Bengal, a site really corresponds to a complex.[17] A complex of mounds, constituting a single site, can, further, figure in what may be called a 'settlement locality' constituted by a series of sites in a micro region. Such a cluster of settlements, in which some evidence of cultural homogeneity may be found, constituted a habitat sphere larger than a single urban centre. Early historical Mathura in the upper Ganga basin may be considered an appropriate example of this.[18] Elsewhere too, clustering of sites constituting a 'settlement locality' which could be distinct from another such locality because of uninhabited space, natural forest cover or natural physical

barriers in between them would not be anything unusual. The nodal point or points in such settlement clusters can be expected to reveal features of urban centre/centres, the nodality of the points being ascertainable in terms of their size, settlement structure and character as well as linkages across space.

II

The points made above were intended to aid our search, somewhat lukewarm so far, for urban centres in early historical Bengal. The points also imply that, given the nature of the data, all that can be attempted is the preparation of a note which can relate to a future agenda of research, directed towards accumulating more meaningful data than have been available to archaeologists and historians so far.

The chronological subphases of early historical urbanism in Bengal cannot be stated with precision, but following the current historiographical trend, a broad distinction may be envisaged between early historical urbanization (*c.* 300 BC–AD 600)[19] and urbanization in the early medieval phase (*c.* AD 600–1200). One can, however, be somewhat more precise about the subregions in which early historical settlements and early historical urban centres occur. One can therefore start by investigating how the distribution of early historical settlements corresponds to the subregions of Bengal and whether there was any change in their distribution pattern over time. On a preliminary examination, the early historical settlements, with their urban 'foci', may be initially grouped under three geographical subregions: (i) Varendra or north Bengal, located to the north of the Ganga. This is a well-defined region of uplands composed of ancient pleistocene alluvium; (ii) lower delta of the Hooghli–Bhagirathi system composed of recent alluvium, which can be divided into eastern and western segments; (iii) the tract of Rāḍha with its core constituted by the districts of Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum but with extensions into other districts.[20]

III

The drainage system of Varendra has a north–south orientation, and within this system are located two sites which have long been recognized as the urban foci of this region. The sites are: Mahasthan (Bogra district, Bangladesh), located on the right bank of the Karatoya[21] and Bangarh (South Dinajpur district), located on the left bank of the Punarbhava,[22] or

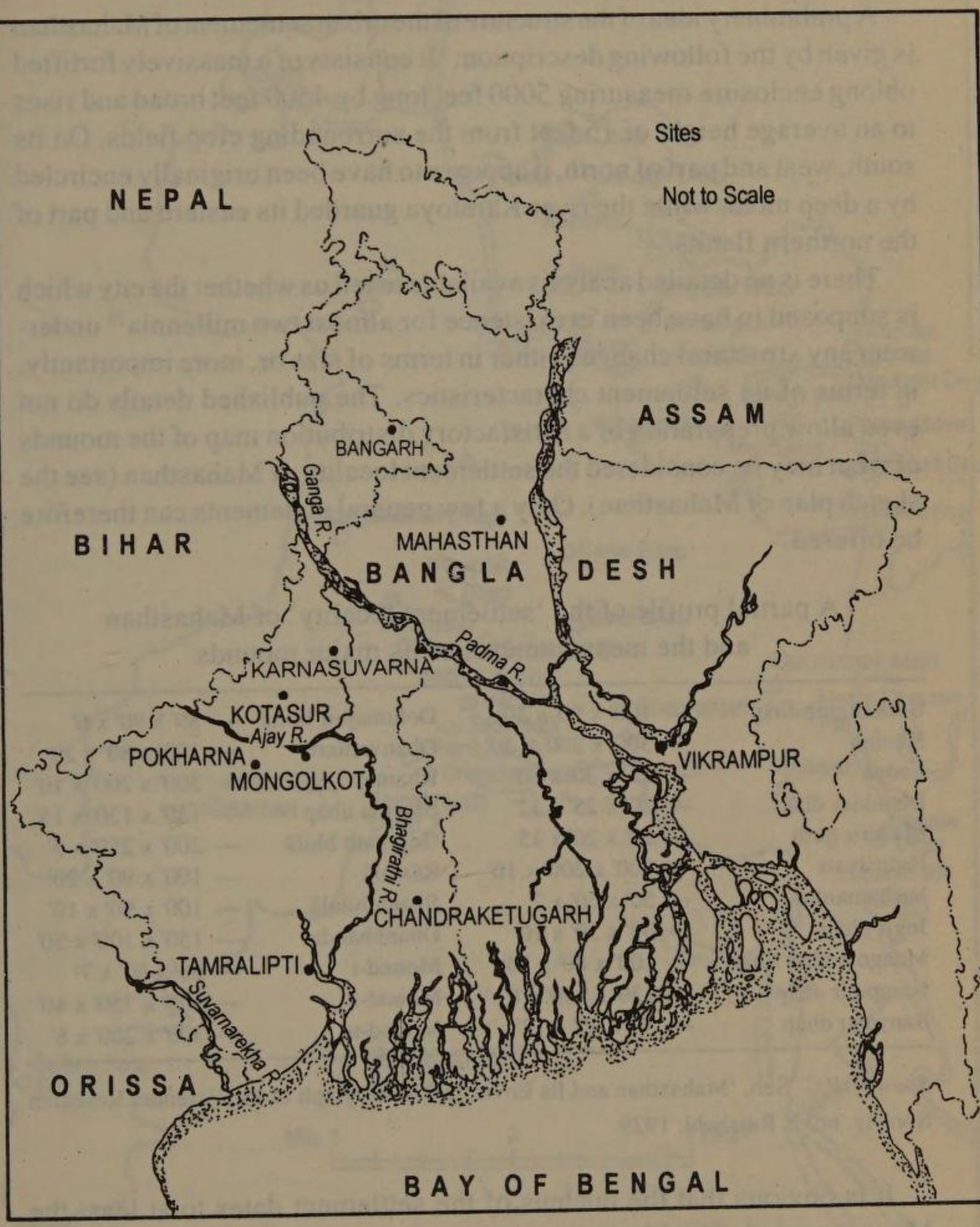
rather on the fork between Punarbhava on the west and Atrai on the east.[22a]

In commenting on the locational pattern of these urban centres, the following general points may be worth taking note of:

(i) The archaeological background of the emergence of urban centres in this region is not clear as yet, but the region yields sufficient evidence from the fifth century AD of the clustering of *grāmas* or rural settlements based on settled agriculture. These rural settlements, with their composite population, are not necessarily of Gupta period origin;[23] in fact, in view of the presence of a *koṣṭhāgāra* or store house,[24] obviously for the purpose of collection and distribution of agricultural resources in Mahasthan, and, as further suggested by its Mauryan period inscription, Mahasthan's pivotal position in famine relief operations, the early urban centres of this region will have to be examined with reference to, among other points, the regional rural network.[25]

(ii) The core of the settlement region of early historical Varendra seems to fall between 24° N and 26° N latitudes, and the major sites of the region are located almost direct east of such sites of the middle Ganga region as Pāṭaliputra and Campā in south Bihar. This will suggest the direction of the most effective linkages between the urban centres of Varendra and sites lying outside the region. These linkages are important for understanding their genesis as well as their structural characteristics.

(iii) As has been suggested earlier, a full-fledged urban centre was likely to represent a nodal point in a network of local settlements which, together, would constitute something like a settlement locality. This point is relevant also for understanding the total settlement configuration of an urban centre, because, in addition to its core settlement area, an urban centre could encompass ancillary sites, and for many urban centres it may be arbitrary to define their extent by drawing rigid boundary lines. Both aspects of this point seem to be borne out by earlier references to the area of Mahasthan, as well as by a recent survey report of the Bogra district, which lists a number of ancient mounds, implying some measure of clustering of settlements, distributed over both banks of the river Karatoya and located in close proximity to Mahasthan. According to one estimate, 'Beyond the fortified citadel, other ancient ruins and mounds fan out within a radius



Urban Centres in Early Bengal

of 5 miles in a semi-circle.'[26] This statement, if correct, may be taken in this particular context to be indicative of the extent of the 'settlement locality' of which the urban settlement of Mahasthan was the node or the core.

A preliminary idea of the structure of the urban settlement of Mahasthan is given by the following description: 'It consists of a massively fortified oblong enclosure measuring 5000 feet long by 4500 feet broad and rises to an average height of 15 feet from the surrounding crop fields. On its south, west and part of north, it appears to have been originally encircled by a deep moat, while the river Karatoya guarded its eastern and part of the northern flanks.'[27]

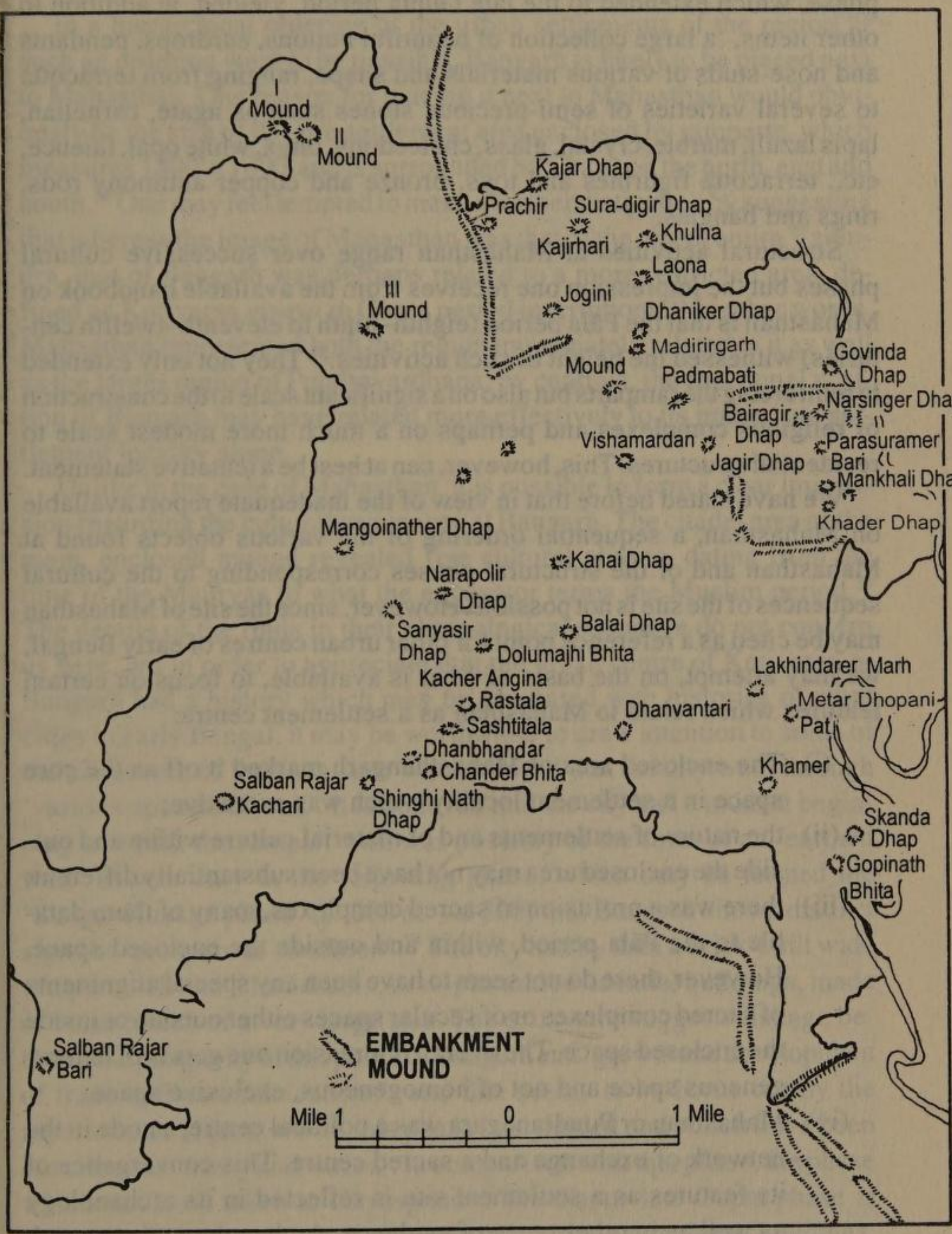
There is no detailed analysis available to tell us whether the city which is supposed to have been in existence for almost two millennia[28] underwent any structural changes either in terms of size or, more importantly, in terms of its settlement characteristics. The published details do not even allow preparation of a satisfactory distribution map of the mounds of what may be considered the settlement locality of Mahasthan (see the sketch plan of Mahasthan). Only a few general statements can therefore be offered.

A partial profile of the 'settlement locality' of Mahasthan and the measurements of its major mounds

Sura-dighir dhāp	— 100' x 90' x 30'	Dolumajhir bhitā	— 80' x 90' x 6'
Khulna	— 300' x 200' x 30'	Dhanvantari	— 100' x '80' x 20'
Laona	— 25' x 30' x 30'	Khamer	— 300' x 200' x 10'
Dhankier dhāp	— 20' x 25' x 12'	Skanda dhāp	— 150' x 130' x 15'
Madarir garh	— 20' x 20' x 15'	Gopinath bhitā	— 200' x 250' x 5'
Padmavati	— 300' x 200' x 10'	Rāstalā	— 100' x 90' x 20'
Vishamardon	— 50' x 50' x 7'	Shashthitalā	— 100' x 90' x 10'
Jogir dhāp	— 30' x 30' x 10'	Dhanbhandar	— 150' x 100' x 30'
Mangolnather dhāp	— 100' x 80' x 30'	Mound-I	— 60' x 60' x 7'
Narapotir dhāp	— 130' x 100' x 8'	Mound-II	— 800' x 750' x 40'
Sanyasir dhāp	— 50' x 50' x 12'	Mound-III	— 300' x 200' x 6'

Source: P.C. Sen, 'Mahasthan and Its Environs', Monograph of the Varendra Research Society, no. 2, Rajshahi, 1929.

It is obvious that the nucleus of the settlement dates to at least the Maurya period. The Maurya period inscription gives it the status of an urban centre by calling it a *nagara*,[29] although excavations so far have not revealed any layer within the area enclosed by ramparts which can be



Sketch Plan of Mahasthangarh

dated to this phase. The archaeological material assigned to this phase of the site in general includes punch-marked and cast copper coins and specimens of Northern Black Polished Ware. Further, apparently the phase, which extended to the late Gupta period, yielded, in addition to other items, 'a large collection of beautiful buttons, eardrops, pendants and nose-studs of various materials and shape, ranging from terracotta to several varieties of semi-precious stones such as agate, carnelian, lapis lazuli, marble, crystal, glass, chalcedony, onyx, white opal, faience, etc., terracotta figurines and toys, bronze and copper antimony rods, rings and bangles.'[30]

Structural activities at Mahasthan range over successive cultural phases but the impression one receives from the available handbook on Mahasthan is that the Pāla period (eighth–ninth to eleventh–twelfth centuries) witnessed the height of such activities.[31] They not only extended to reinforcing the ramparts but also on a significant scale to the construction of religious complexes and perhaps on a much more modest scale to residential structures. This, however, can at best be a tentative statement.

We have stated before that in view of the inadequate report available on Mahasthan, a sequential ordering of the various objects found at Mahasthan and of the structural phases corresponding to the cultural sequences of the site is not possible. However, since the site of Mahasthan may be cited as a reference point for other urban centres of early Bengal, we may attempt, on the basis of what is available, to focus on certain features which relate to Mahasthan as a settlement centre:

(i) The enclosed area of Mahasthangarh marked it off as the core space in a settlement locality which was extensive;

(ii) the nature of settlements and of material culture within and outside the enclosed area may not have been substantially different;

(iii) there was a profusion of sacred complexes, many of them datable to the Pāla period, within and outside the enclosed space. However, there do not seem to have been any special alignments of sacred complexes or of secular spaces either outside or inside the enclosed space. The overall impression one gets is of heterogeneous space and not of homogeneous, exclusive space;

(iv) Mahasthan or Puṇḍranagara was a political centre, a node in the network of exchange and a sacred centre. This convergence of its features as a settlement site is reflected in its archaeology as well as in other types of evidence. Archaeological material, available to date, does not permit us to speculate about shifts within this basic character of Mahasthan as an urban settlement,

despite the fact that religious shrines came to be the dominant structures not only in the enclosed space but also in the entire settlement area.

In a hierarchical ordering of the urban settlements of the region, if such an ordering were to be possible, Bangarh is likely to be placed next to Mahasthan. One reason for placing it next to Mahasthan would obviously be the size of its core settlement area enclosed by ramparts, which measures 1800' x 1000' and is surrounded by a moat on the north, east and south.[32] One may feel tempted to make a further distinction by suggesting that whereas the image of Mahasthan was that of the city of entire Varendra, that of Bangarh was perhaps related to a more restricted area, defined as Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* in Gupta period inscriptions.[33] In other words, Mahasthan represented both the region immediately related to it as well as the larger region of Puṇḍravardhana; by contrast, the functional position of Bangarh may have related more effectively to its immediate settlement locality alone.

Unlike in the case of Mahasthan, it is possible to form a clear impression regarding the cultural sequences at Bangarh. The citadel area or the main, enclosed mound revealed five cultural phases, dating from the time of the Mauryas to what the excavator terms the Muslim period.[34] The details of the finds in their chronological sequence do not concern us here, but in order to appreciate that the urban centre of Koṭivarṣa or Bangarh had a history which may be compared with histories of other cities in early Bengal, it may be worthwhile to draw attention to some of the comments of the excavator who believed that the city went through 'various ups and downs'. It is believed that the city had a modest beginning in which the rampart wall was possibly of the form of an 'earthen wall'. It was only in the following phase, which may be termed the 'Śuṅga–Kuṣāṇa phase' (*c.* 200 BC–AD 300) that Bangarh shows distinct signs of 'prosperous condition'.[35] The city had by then a brick-built wide rampart wall and it had drains, cess-pits and residential buildings, made of burnt bricks of a very large size. The excavator suggests linkage between the prosperity of this phase of Bangarh and 'growth and development of trade and communications', and this seems to be borne out by the repertoire of objects which this phase has yielded and which have been described as 'many and varied'. In comparison with this phase, the phase which has been taken to correspond to the Gupta–late Gupta phase is marked by 'decadence', particularly in terms of construction of buildings, characterized as 'very weak and poor'. This again contrasts sharply with the prosperous condition of the Pāla period, the prosperity of this latter

phase having been suggested by evidence of two types: (i) 'The structures of this period comprise in rampart walls, compound walls, residential quarters, temples with ambulatory path and its enclosing walls, damp-proof granaries, bath-rooms, platform, ramp, drain, ring well, etc.'; (ii) 'As regards the associated objects of (this) stratum, we come across some colossal jars, vases, lamps, tumblers, cooking pots, dishes, bowls, saucers, lids (or jar covers), and also some miniature objects of pottery; terracotta image of Gaṇeśa and various toys (animal and human figurines), marbles, copper objects and iron implements, miniature ivory stick and awls, beads of various stones and terracotta, bangles of glass and terra-cotta, etc. as also terracotta plaques and decorative bricks of various motifs.'[36]

Obviously, the two nodes of the Varendra region continued as nodes into the early medieval period, and the evidence from the more well-documented Bangarh which may be expected to have had parallels at Mahasthan suggests that the Pāla phase, marking a definitive phase in the formation of the regional power structure with a strong base in Varendra,[37] represented also a significant new phase in the history of the two major urban centres of the region.

IV

If Mahasthan and Bangarh are taken as providing the required perspectives on the cultural chronology and the physical structure of the early historical urban centres of Bengal, then we may proceed to examine how urban centres in other subregions may be viewed from these perspectives. Two other subregions in which early historical settlements are found distributed in significant numbers would correspond to: (i) the lower delta, (ii) the core area of the Rāḍha region constituted roughly by the districts of Burdwan, Bankura and Birbhum. If these are areas of concentration, then of course there are sites which lie outside the area of concentration. Early historical settlements in the lower delta are found distributed over both banks of the Bhagirathi in a region which is entirely made up of very recent alluvium and which is intersected by a dense network of rivers. It is common knowledge that the two nodes of this region, at least one of which sprang to urban life almost as if suddenly in the early historical period, were Chandraketugarh and Tāmralipti.[38] It hardly needs reiterating that both derived their importance as early historical ports: Tāmralipti figures in indigenous, classical and Chinese sources as a point of embarkation for overseas trade and travel; arguments adduced

in favour of identifying Chandraketugarh with Gange of classical sources are sufficiently convincing.[39] However, the maritime importance or history of these two centres need not concern us for the present; we shall concern ourselves with their urban characteristics and urban history, and make comparisons, when necessary, for this purpose.

Although the excavator of Chandraketugarh feels that the history of habitation at the site may date back to the sixth-seventh century BC and may thus precede its urban phase by a large margin,[40] by and large the sequence of habitation in the lower delta to the east of the Bhagirathi cannot, at the present state of our knowledge, be dated much earlier than the Maurya period. The settlements of the locality of which Chandraketugarh was the node may not have come up with absolute simultaneity, but even then the extent and clustering of the settlements in the region would have been remarkable because the lower delta must have originally had a formidable vegetation cover and one can therefore assume that the settlements of the locality were distributed over a comparatively limited area.

Located close to the Vidyadhari, once a large tributary of the Bhagirathi, and to the Padma, a minor river, the settlement dimensions of Chandraketugarh[41] appear to go beyond its description as a port city alone and may invoke comparison with the urban centres of Varendra: (i) The site itself comprises the 'villages of Devalaya, Hadipur, Shanpukur and Jhikra, etc., and covers an area of about two square miles'; (ii) the site was bounded by 'huge rampart walls of mud about rectangular in shape'.[42]

Two special features of the archaeology of Chandraketugarh which may be chosen for comparison with other sites may be noted here. One is that occupation levels of the early phase, which may be taken to correspond to the pre-Gupta phase, 'show the signs of *Kāchchā* houses built of wood, bamboo and tiles . . . and mud walls on mud-plinth'. According to the excavator, 'construction of brick houses at Chandraketugarh seems to be a later device, probably of the Gupta period'. This, it may be briefly noted, is in sharp contrast with what is reported for Bangarh, although the repertoire of objects from the early historical phase of this site is as impressive as, if not more than, the finds at Bangarh. Second, the trial diggings at Chandraketugarh seem to show, although one should keep in mind the limited nature of the evidence, separation between the habitation area which was exposed close to the eastern rampart wall within the city and the sacred complex at a northern high mound, known as Khana Mihirer *dhipi*. The sacred complex, consisting of a stupendous brick

temple and other shrines, started becoming prominent structures of the settlement in the same Gupta phase in which, if one goes by the suggestion of the excavator, brick structures were coming up in the habitation area close to the eastern segment of the rampart wall. However, there appear to be significant variations in what has been reported from the same cultural phase represented at different sites within the settlement complex of Chandraketugarh. For example, while Period IV corresponding to the Gupta period at the Itkhola site within the enclosed space appears quite prosperous, a thick layer of sandy clay was noticed at the site of Noongola.[43] Similarly, at the site of Hadipur, habitation seems to have begun only in the phase which corresponds to Period II at Chandraketugarh and it was only from Period III that evidence of elaborate house complexes of wattle and daub with tiled roofs, mud floors, grain storage, ring wells and other cultural items like pottery, terracotta figurines, awls of ivory and bone, copper bowls, etc. are found.[44]

The point about citing the above details is that within the time-span of pre-Maurya to late Gupta period, to which the documented history of Chandraketugarh largely relates, the repertoire of cultural items yielded by the locality was largely uniform, but the history of the sites which constituted the locality of Chandraketugarh must have varied in terms of occupational history and structure of the site.

Compared to Chandraketugarh, the settlement dimensions of Tāmralipti (Midnapur district), represented by the site of Tamluk on the right bank of the Rupnarayan, a tributary of the Bhagirathi, are as yet unclear. That it was located in a cluster of sites distributed in the region is becoming somewhat clear now, and this would suggest conformity to a pattern which is found elsewhere. However, unlike Mahasthan, Bangarh and Chandraketugarh, Tāmralipti does not seem to have had any enclosed space which marked off its core area from the rest of what may be considered the Tāmralipti settlement complex.

Locationally, although Tāmralipti is taken as a part of the lower delta subregion for the purpose of this essay, it may, both in geographical and cultural terms, also represent an extension of the Rāḍha tract of the chalcolithic phase. If Tāmralipti experienced urbanism in the early historical period, it was a slow development from a long-drawn interaction with urban centres along the Ganga basin. Excavations undertaken to ascertain the cultural sequences of the site reveal a cultural substratum which was analogous to what is found in the neolithic–chalcolithic culture phase in Bengal and which may perhaps be more appropriately characterized as a microlithic–neolithic–chalcolithic nexus.[45] This initial culture-phase is

followed by one which reveals evidence of contact with Maurya–Śuṅga upper India, but what excavations reveal seems to suggest that it is only in culture phase III, which may be taken to correspond to the Kuṣāṇa period, that the site acquired urban characteristics. Obviously, this statement is not based on the settlement dimensions and characteristics of the site, which are impossible to determine, but on the nature of artefacts, both surface finds and excavated, which have been taken to represent urban characteristics of early historical settlements of northern India. These, in addition to the presence of burnt-brick structures, are available in the form of local and varieties of non-local pottery including rouletted ware (which is indicative of some form of Indo-Roman contact), magnificent specimens of terracotta art, coinage, seals and sealings, specimens of writing not only in Brāhmī but also in Kharoṣṭhī and what is being considered as Kharoṣṭhī-Brāhmī,[46] specimens of lapidary art represented by beads of diverse material and so on. If all these collectively constituted the material culture of the urban settlement of Tāmralipti, the decline of this culture is evident in the culture phase which followed Period IV. This sequence which pinpoints the phase coinciding with the Kuṣāṇa period as urban in Tāmralipti is roughly confirmed by the excavations of 1973–4 at the site.[46a]

Two points need to be clarified about the comments made above on Tāmralipti. The settlement history of Tāmralipti ranged from the neolithic–chalcolithic through early historical phase to the beginning of the early medieval period, if not later; it has further been suggested that it existed as an ancient port of Bengal for at least a millennium from *c.* 300 BC to AD 700.[47] In pinpointing the Kuṣāṇa period as the urban phase of Tāmralipti in the long-term settlement history of the site, it is not being suggested that it could not serve as a port of embarkation earlier or later; in archaeological terms, however, there is nothing much which can characterize any other phase of Tāmralipti as markedly urban. In terms of its cultural chronology and cultural equipment, it therefore seems necessary to institute detailed comparisons with other sites, keeping in mind the possibility of cultural and chronological correspondence with other sites of the lower delta.

Second, the locational and initial cultural proximity of Tāmralipti with archaeological sites of Rāḍha may have generated the assertion that 'while Tamralipta was related with the trade and commerce of [*sic*] vast tract lying to the west of the present Bhagirathi-Hugli river, Gange was the entrepot of the eastern plain of the lower Brahmaputra, Padma and Meghna valley and also the capital city of ancient deltaic civilization'.[48]

Such facile formulations are wholly unwarranted in archaeological terms. Besides the fact that pre-Christian early historical archaeology of the Brahmaputra, Padma and Meghna valleys is as yet an almost unknown entity,[48a] whatever may be considered as urban elements in the early historical culture of Bengal are more or less evenly distributed in the entire region in which early settlements have been found. Even so, the subregion of the lower delta, of which Tāmralipti and Chandraketugarh may be taken as two major nodes in the early historical period, was a zone of maximum interaction, with multidirectional linkages having been established with upper India, and through upper India with Central Asia, littoral India, north Egypt and the Mediterranean world and with Southeast Asia and China. The urban character of the settlement at Chandraketugarh with its maritime activity and the transformation also of Tāmralipti as a 'port city' were thus parts of broader historical processes, and once the pattern of linkages became relatively weak, the nodes of the region may have continued as settlement centres, but they lost their vigorous urban characteristics. It has to be recognized that the lower delta region, unlike Varendra and Vaṅga, did not ever develop as a political region with such stable centres of political power as Puṇḍravardhana and Vikramapura.

V

The site of Tāmralipti, discussed above, represents the tapering off of the Rāḍha tract, the core region of which, as mentioned before, constituted the districts of Burdwan, Birbhum and Bankura, and its merging with the early historical region of the lower delta. In the next section it will be pointed out that Karṇasuvarṇa, constituted by a series of mounds on the right bank of the Bhagirathi in Murshidabad district, represented a major node of the Rāḍha subregion of Bengal in the post-Gupta period, and was an early historical centre in this subregion, although it may not have attained an urban status in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Among the settlements which may be seriously considered to have acquired urban dimensions in the early historical period in the subregion of Rāḍha, mention may be made of Kotasur on the bank of the Mayurakshi in Birbhum district; Pokhanna on the south bank of the Damodar in Bankura district; and Mangalkot, located on the confluence of the Kunur and Ajay, in Burdwan district. The distribution pattern of these three centres is suggestive; it shows that: (a) the region which was the core region of the neolithic–chalcolithic culture phase in Bengal[48b] and in which the earliest farming communities of Bengal, practising rice cultivation emerged, threw up separate nuclei along the three main rivers of the region; (b) these centres, more than the early historical centres in any other

subregion, may have represented convergence of attempts to exploit and utilize local resources. This is a point which for the present can only be suggested and not elaborated.

The reasons for picking on Kotasur, Pokhanna and Mangalkot, from among a number of early historical settlements, as possible urban centres of Rāḍha may be briefly stated. Although practically nothing is known about the other urban characteristics of the site, explorations at Kotasur have revealed 'a mud fortification wall, 1 km. in circuit' and also perhaps part of an original surrounding moat[49] (see the sketch plan). Pokhanna is most certainly identical with Puṣkaraṇa, mentioned in the Susunia Hill inscription of Candravarman,[50] a contemporary of Gupta ruler Samudragupta of the fourth century AD. As the political centre of the earliest monarchical local state and as an archaeological site most certainly dating to the early Gupta or even pre-Gupta period, Pokhanna, judging by the varieties of its antiquities, may have been an urban centre of modest dimensions.[51]

The site with the greatest potentiality is of course Mangalkot not just because it has been subjected to several seasons of excavation,[52] but because of its dimensions as a settlement (although no estimate regarding its extent is as yet available) and the richness of its antiquities. Archaeological explorations and chance surface finds at Mangalkot and the adjoining villages seem to reveal extension of the settlement alongside the dried bed of the Kunur and Ajay, whereas the core of the settlement seems to be constituted by, among a number of 'scattered mounds', three major mounds: Vikramadityer-*dhibi*, Kachari-*danga* and Sarkari-*danga*.[53] The spatial dimensions of the total settlement complex of Mangalkot may be gauged from the fact that Vikramadityer-*dhibi* alone, which stretches as far as the bank of the Kunur in the west and south, the Ajay in the northeast and the Burdwan–Natunhat road in the east, stretches for almost two square kilometres.[54] It is of additional significance that parts of the rampart walls which enclosed the extensive site can still be located, although a complete sketch attempting to reconstruct the total contour of the enclosure is not yet available.[55]

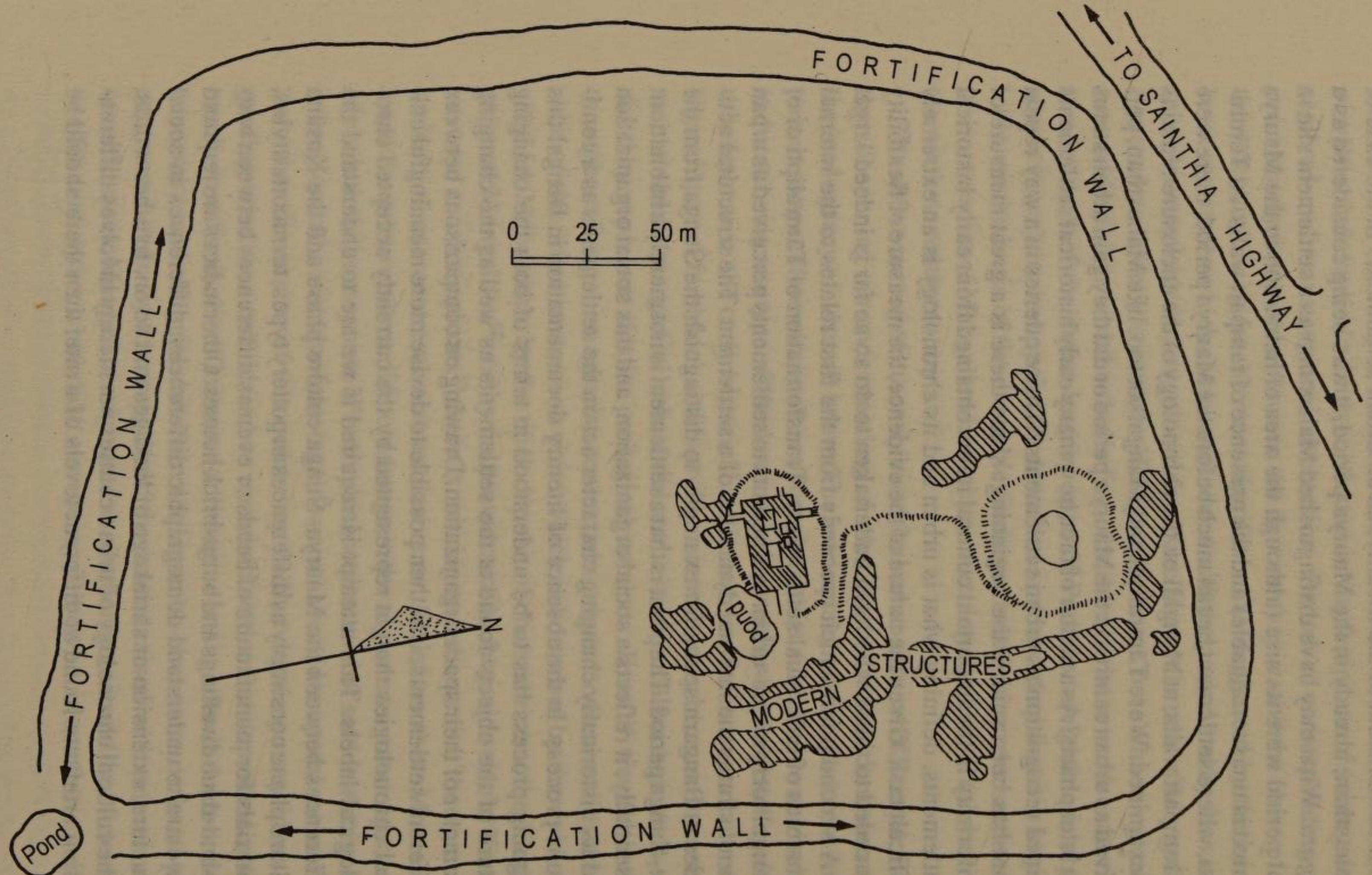
Excavations at Mangalkot are reported to have revealed a sequence of cultures extending over six phases or periods. The 'genesis' of the urban phase at the site has been dated to Period IV, the exact chronological span of which is not very clearly stated by the excavator.[56] It is, however, sufficiently clear that elements associated with Ganga valley culture, in the forms of coinage, specimens of terracotta art, Northern Black Polished Ware, etc. all found their way into Mangalkot in Periods III and IV (*c.* third century BC–first century AD), although, as in Chandraketugarh

and Tamluk (Tāmralipti), the local characteristics as in the construction of wattle-and-daub dwellings continued during this phase of subregional, regional and trans-regional interaction. Period V, corresponding approximately to the span between the first century AD and the close of the third century, is by far the most significant, as suggested by the burnt-brick structures which can be associated with the period and by the variety of objects yielded by its cultural deposits. The settlement of Mangalkot figures prominently in medieval Bengali literature, but archaeologically, beyond Period VI, which extends from the third to the seventh centuries, the deposits of the entire lengthy span of Period VII (eighth century to recent times) are so hopelessly disturbed and mixed up that it is impossible, on the basis of the available findings, to reflect on the settlement characteristics of Mangalkot from any archaeological perspective beyond the sixth-seventh century AD.

The above survey of the early historical urban centres of Bengal, more than deepening our understanding of what they were like, demonstrates the inadequacy of what we know. The inadequacy of what we know compels us to speculate on a number of crucial points. One point would relate to questioning any type of blanket chronology either for the genesis of the urban phase in the early historical settlements or for its overall chronological span. A fresh look at this problem is necessary because the settlements which emerged as 'urban' did not have identical backgrounds, nor did they represent similar ecological contexts. Even if we admit that throughout Bengal, an agrarian context was present to ensure the sustenance of the urban centres—a point which is borne out by the evidence cited for Mahasthan, by the thick deposit of charred rice at the Kuṣāṇa phase at Mangalkot,[58] and by the presence of burnt grains also at Karṇasuvarṇa at a later phase,[59] there is nothing to indicate that the agrarian umland of one centre was as extensive as that of another. Moreover, since the urban centres did not emerge in the region as a natural process of evolution, the response of individual settlements or settlements in any subregion to the stimulus from outside must have had temporal variations. A further dimension of this point may be that contemporary ideas regarding what was considered as an urban settlement depended not so much on a fixed set of criteria—although certain criteria were indeed necessary to distinguish between settlements—but more on local perceptions. Let us try to comprehend the issues raised with reference to specific cases. Mangalkot originated as a settlement around the thirteenth/twelfth century BC; when did it start being perceived, in comparison with

other settlements of the locality, as an urban settlement? In the case of Mahasthan, already in the Maurya period, it was being considered as a *nagara*. What may have distinguished Mahasthan as a settlement site in that period were its size (although the area of habitation in the Maurya period is unascertainable) and the presence of rampart walls. At Tāmralipti, where settlement began much before the Maurya period, there were no rampart walls; at Mangalkot, the chronology of the enclosure remains unexamined. Were Tāmralipti and Mangalkot too, like Mahasthan, perceived as urban centres in the Maurya period or did they gain urban status at a later phase? As a matter of fact, how many early historical settlements gained recognition as urban settlements? These queries in a way repeat what has been said in the beginning: since there is a great measure of uniformity in the important cultural items obtained from early historical settlements, defining what is urban and its chronology is an extremely difficult task. Given the nature of the evidence, the measure of flexibility conceded to those who have undertaken to do so so far is indeed large.

A second point which proceeds from the first relates to the internal dynamics of individual settlements. Transformation of Tāmralipti or of Mangalkot from pre-urban settlements to settlements perceived as urban demonstrates the internal dynamics of a settlement. The structural activities at Bangarh seem, for example, to distinguish the Suṅga from the pre-Śuṅga period. The point is that a settlement is not merely a habitation: essentially, it reflects a social organization, and this social organization and its historically changing character act on the settlements as a continuous process. In the absence of literary documentation in Bengal this ongoing process has to be understood in terms of both the changing nature of the objects found at the settlements as well as the changing character of their space organization. Drawing on comparisons between different settlements, it is then possible to devise more meaningful cultural chronologies than is represented by the currently accepted chronological labels. This attempt is required if we are to understand the differences between the Maurya–Śuṅga culture phase and the Kuṣāṇa culture phase not simply as differences in pottery types, terracotta styles, materials for manufacture of beads or even as differences between wattle-and-daub dwellings and burnt-brick houses. Other indices are required if we are to understand demographic differences, differences in social structure, extension or shrinkage of linkages and so on. In other words, if the cultural chronology of urban centres not merely involves differentiating artefacts found at different levels of a site, then there should be



Sketch Plan of Kotasur, District Birbhum
(Courtesy: Dr A.K. Nag, Visvabharati)

other ways in which we start looking at sites like Mahasthan, Bangarh, Chandraketugarh, Tāmralipti and Mangalkot: as individual settlements which respond to general historical processes in their individual ways and may therefore reveal uniquely individual features even in a broadly homogeneous culture phase.

V

Current historiography on urban centres in early Bengal, despite variations within it, appears to be characterized by a consensus that the post-Gupta period marked a break from the early historical pattern of urbanism. The characteristics of post-Gupta urbanism or even urbanism of the Gupta phase do not figure uniformly in historical writings available to us. N.R. Ray who first stressed this phenomenon of change[60] believed that whereas the early historical urban centres had their foundation in commercial prosperity and a wide network of commercial linkage, the urban centres of early medieval times were more centres of royal power than centres of commerce. Other opinions either view survival of early urban centres to represent changed settlement characteristics, underlining their transformation as religious centres,[61] or stress the notion of 'urban decay',[62] a regional manifestation of a pan-Indian phenomenon. According to the latter view, the nature of the early medieval political structure did not even facilitate the formation of stable political centres since the *jaya-skandhāvāras* or 'camps of victory' which the inscriptions of the post-Gupta period frequently refer to were essentially transient in character.[63] The period further witnessed the appearance of exclusive settlements like fortresses[64] which obviously were oriented towards specific functions, unlike a true urban centre with its heterogeneity of functions. Despite variations, the opinions so far seem to converge on one point, namely, that the decline, or the transformed nature of urbanism in early medieval Bengal, derived from the decline of commerce; this alone seems to have been highlighted, so far, as the major contributory factor towards the growth, as well as the decline, of urban centres in Bengal.

It would perhaps not be a fruitful exercise to respond in detail to this historiography in the absence of relevant, testable data in adequate quantum. However, we have pointed out earlier that in one subregion of Bengal, that is Varendra, the two major urban centres of the early historical period, Mahasthan and Bangarh, do not appear to have undergone noticeable decline, although material remains dating to different cultural phases may have changed substantially in character. In other subregions, as

in Rāḍha, an archaeological site like Mangalkot reveals comparable continuity till at least the early Pāla period, and the details available so far are too inadequate to suggest if the structure of the settlement had gone through any radical changes beyond this phase.

In responding to the theory of urban decay, it has sometimes been felt that it was exactly the opposite that happened in Bengal which experienced 'the process of a deep-rooted and growing urbanization from the Gupta period onwards'.[65] The argument urging this position is: 'A historical process in which the rural, the urban, the commercial and the religious form an inseparable web, demands perhaps a new understanding of what is meant by the term urbanism in relation to Bengal.'[66] While the plea for a 'new understanding' cannot be made with reference to a single region alone in isolation from others, a proper regional perspective is nevertheless required to try and reassess the issue. In the context of Bengal which is constituted by several subregions, this should essentially entail examining the urban profile of the subregions separately as in the case of the early historical phase and then trying to form an overview of the pattern. The framework, even in a regional context, has to be that of recognition of variations even within well-defined cultural phases. This recognition involves:

(i) examining whether over a period of time the settlements and their nodes in any particular subregion/subregions become somewhat obscure from the point of view of historical documentation;
(ii) identifying subregion/subregions in which settlements, including those urban in character, continue over a long chronological span and in which new nodes emerge;
(iii) identifying subregions in which settlements proliferate on a significant scale from particular historical moments, suggesting simultaneously the possibility of emergence of nodes in such subregions.

A thorough examination of these points on the basis of empirical evidence is not possible at present. So far as the subregion constituted by the lower Ganga delta is concerned, while inscriptional references to villages and sporadic finds of archaeological material attributed to the Pāla–Sena period would suggest continuity of settlements, there is hardly any evidence which can suggest continuity of early historical urbanism in this subregion beyond the late Gupta period.[67] The material collected from a number of explored sites and observations advanced by archaeologists

regarding findings at both Tamluk and Chandraketugarh would seem to bear this out. This is not to say that as settlement sites they came to be abandoned; they seem to have continued as settlements in an area in which the urban phase had come to an end.

At the same time, any casual overview of the historical geography of early Bengal from a chronological perspective would point to continuous and horizontal expansion of settlement areas, proliferation of rural settlements based on sedentary agriculture and the likelihood, therefore, of the emergence of new urban centres in hitherto unrepresented subregions. Even without commenting on the history of rural settlement formation in the region to the east of the Padma, it should be in order to suggest that in Gupta and post-Gupta Bengal when rural settlements and political centres figure for the first time in the epigraphic records of the area,[68] when new historical regions/centres like Samataṭa, Harikela, Paṭṭikera and Śrīhaṭṭa[69] make their appearance on the historical atlas and when a new commercial network at a subregional level, with contacts overseas and across the borders of the subcontinent, is crystallized,[70] the impetus for a new spurt of urbanization must have been overwhelmingly present. Unfortunately, the settlement configurations of the subregions of Vaṅga and of southeast Bengal are not very clear, but centres like Devaparvata or Vikramapura, which were either subregional nodes or whose contemporary importance transcended the subregional level,[71] figure repeatedly in inscriptions and must have reached urban proportions in the period between the seventh and the twelfth centuries.

In two other subregions, Varendra and Rāḍha, archaeology reveals, to reiterate a point made earlier, continuity of settlements and of urban centres, despite variations within this continuity. To take Varendra as a sample, the nuclearity of this subregion in the early medieval history and polity of Bengal not only ensured the survival of its earlier urban centres but permitted the rise of new urban centres in the early medieval political context. Literature attests and sometimes provides idealized descriptions of such cities as Rāmāvatī,[73] and that there is an essential correlation between the nuclearity of a subregion and urban growth in the area is suggested by the rise of new urban centres in Varendra beyond the decline of Sena power in Bengal.

A survey of the early medieval urban centres of the subregions mentioned above will not be attempted here both because they figure mostly as literary and epigraphic references and because archaeological observations on such centres as Mangalkot which can be considered as urban are as yet inadequate. The only site one can choose as representing a

segment of a post-Gupta urban centre is therefore Rajbadidanga in the district of Murshidabad, which was excavated for a number of seasons and for which a somewhat detailed, though in many respects not adequate, report is available.

For an understanding of the nature of an urban centre in the early medieval context, the site of Rajbadidanga and its environs, now convincingly identified with Karṇasuvarṇa, the capital of the seventh-century ruler Śaśāṅka, should have served as an ideal sample, had the attention of its excavator been directed not simply towards establishing the identification of the site with Karṇasuvarṇa but towards comprehending its urban character and cultural chronology as well. Located on the 'west side' of the river Bhagirathi, Rajbadidanga was definitely a major point not only in the communication line between Varendra and the lower delta but also between the subregion of Rāḍha and southern Bihar and other subregions of Bengal to the east. This location which fostered linkages in terms of both overland lines of communication as well as along the Bhagirathi would explain the incidence of several artefacts, obviously of non-local origin, at the site.[74] Equally importantly, Karṇasuvarṇa was situated in an area of peasant settlement concentration. If one goes by the evidence of the Bappaghosavata grant of Jayanāga,[75] datable to the sixth century, peasant villages, with a fair representation of Brāhmaṇical settlements, and thus implying the availability of a sizeable quantum of surplus, typified the agrarian situation of the region of which Karṇasuvarṇa was obviously a major node. The movement of this surplus in some measure at least to centres like Karṇasuvarṇa is suggested by a significant piece of evidence in the form of 'a solid deposition of burnt grains' in a small area in trenches C3 and D3 at the site of Rajbadidanga.[76] According to the excavator, 'It appeared that the area formed part of a big granary which caught fire and was completely burnt. Burnt grains comprised both wheat and rice. . . . Three varieties of rice have been found out—superfine, fine and coarse. Wheat appears to belong to the North Indian variety.'[77] Although the excavator is inclined to take this as evidence of wheat cultivation in the region, a more likely explanation of the presence of wheat at Rajbadidanga, in the absence of any reliable evidence of wheat cultivation in the region, would be linkage with wheat-producing upper India. Karṇasuvarṇa therefore produces evidence of a wide network of linkages with south Bengal, south India and the upper Ganges basin, in addition to other regions. Besides, at least in the seventh century, Karṇasuvarṇa existed as a major political centre of north India. The nodality of

Karṇasuvarṇa derived from its linkage with an old and extensive agrarian umland, the wide network of communication lines connecting it with areas beyond the Rāḍha subregion and its political as well as religious importance.

It is not possible to attempt a detailed analysis of the structural characteristics of the total settlement complex of Karṇasuvarṇa whose chronological span extends from the second-third to the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, but certain relevant points may be noted. Karṇasuvarṇa too, like Mahasthan in north Bengal and Chandraketugarh in the lower delta subregion, was a settlement centre in what we have earlier termed 'settlement locality', and the territorial expanse of this 'settlement locality' can be gauged from the way the ancient mounds were spread to the west of the Bhagirathi.[77a] The urban settlement of Karṇasuvarṇa which we consider as the node of this settlement locality was itself a complex of mounds, and the excavator of the site lists, among 'high lands, mounds and scattered ruins', the following as the more conspicuous ones: Rakshashidanga, Rajbadidanga, Thakurbadidanga, Sannyasidanga, Bhimke-talao and Yamuna-talao. In addition 'most of the neighbouring villages of Chiruti are actually built on the old settlement sites'.[78]

The settlement profile of the urban complex of Karṇasuvarṇa can be reconstructed only by taking into account all these habitation areas and structural remains and by keeping in view the fact that individual segments in the total complex may have had differentiated chronology. In other words, although the chronological span of Rajbadidanga, the excavated site, covers a millennium (second-third to twelfth-thirteenth century), this span may not apply uniformly to the entire complex constituted by the extant mounds. Even if Rajbadidanga, the mound with an area of 503,500 sq. ft[79] is considered one core point in the settlement complex of Karṇasuvarṇa, one has to consider its complementarity with a mound like Rakshashidanga (measuring 700' in circumference)[80] and many others like Rakshashidanga. In any case, on many counts an analysis of Karṇasuvarṇa as an urban centre of early medieval Bengal has to remain perfunctory despite the fact that the site was subjected to careful excavation over a number of seasons; these may, hopefully, serve as reminders to future excavators that the 'secrets' of a site are revealed only when excavations are carried out with relevant questions in mind. For the present, the following points may be noted:

(a) The history of the site encompasses three culture sequences, and, in terms of their characteristics, the sequences may be thus arranged:[81]

Period I (second-third–fourth-fifth century)	:	'Characterized by the presence of plain and crude pottery and absence of inscribed seals'.
Period II (fifth-sixth–ninth-tenth century)	:	'Rich cultural equipments: distinguished by inscribed seals and other antiquities'.
Period III (ninth-tenth–twelfth-thirteenth century)	:	'Declining stage—marked off by the the absence of seals'.

Despite distinctions made between the cultural phases, somewhat vaguely in terms of the richness of particular cultural equipment or their absence, what is not clear is whether the site of Karṇasuvarṇa as a centre of settlement can be regarded as urban in character throughout the period of its existence or whether it acquired urban characteristics only gradually in Period II and experienced 'urban decline' in Period III.

(b) It has already been remarked above that like Mahasthan, Karṇasuvarṇa too represents a node in a settlement region, the extent of the region being suggested by the distribution map of archaeological mounds around Karṇasuvarṇa. However, the core urban point of the 'settlement region' or even of the total urban complex has remained elusive. Karṇasuvarṇa, unlike Mahasthan, Bangarh and Chandraketugarh, does not reveal any enclosed space, distinguishing it from the rest of the settlement area. Thus, although 'the excavation at Rajbadidanga revealed prolific building activities—ascribed to five distinct phases',[82] the inadequacy of what the excavation offers for an understanding of the character of Karṇasuvarṇa as an urban complex comes through in the following statement by the excavator: '. . . the famous capital city of Karṇasuvarṇa stood in the neighbourhood of the excavated site of Rajbadidanga'.[83] The excavations, both at Rakshashidanga and Rajbadidanga, seem to have exposed only the 'sacred segment' of the site, represented by its Buddhist monastic establishments, an exercise which does not tell us anything about how the 'sacred segment' related to other components of the settlement, spatially as well as in other terms.[83a]

VI

We may now attempt a recapitulation. It was noted in the beginning that defining what an urban centre is, in a given historical–spatial context, should be a precondition for a study of urbanization. With this precondition in mind, a few archaeological sites were chosen for the present essay, the rationale for their selection being:

(i) they loosely approximate the set of criteria by which an urban centre may be identified;
(ii) they represent different subregions of early Bengal; and,
(iii) taken together, the selected sites span all the cultural phases of early Bengal.

The attempt to analyse the urban history of early Bengal on the basis of the chosen sites has suffered from one glaring lapse, namely, the absence, from the list, of urban centres which may represent central and south-eastern Bangladesh, corresponding roughly to the Vaṅga and Samataṭa subregions of the ancient period. The lapse, at the same time, may suggest two possibilities: (a) that our search for urban centres in terms of the historical archaeology of the region has so far been perfunctory and has not advanced beyond looking for names of cities in literature and inscriptions; (b) the archaeological remains of sacred complexes in early Bangladesh are so much more impressive than secular settlement sites that the latter category, by no means including only urban centres, has eluded the attention of archaeologists so far. This point however needs to be explored beyond this casual statement for it will bear upon both the chronological span as well as the settlement characteristics of the region.

Two points that arise from the specific centres we have used for the present study may be highlighted. One, they do seem to point to early urban typologies as well as hierarchy of urban settlements, but the material at our disposal is too meagre to permit us to venture beyond making the suggestion. For example, the settlement characteristics of Mahasthan, Bangarh and Chandraketugarh included the presence of rampart walls around what must have been considered the core of the settlement, but they seem to be absent at Tāmralipti and Karṇasuvarṇa. The presence or absence of rampart walls may not relate to the scale of hierarchy since they are reported at sites like Mangalkot and Kotasur which, if one goes by archaeological evidence regarding the extent of the settlement region as well as non-archaeological evidence, were relatively peripheral and less significant settlements than Tāmralipti and Karṇasuvarṇa. Apart from the presence of rampart walls, typological distinction may be made in very general terms by using such descriptive labels as 'port city' (in relation to, say, Tāmralipti and Chandraketugarh) or 'political centre' (in relation to Puṇḍravardhana or Mahasthan), but ultimately such descriptive labels will remain more or less meaningless as guides to the personalities of the urban centres until more relevant data are accumulated.

Second, cultural sequences at the selected centres do not seem to represent a uniform pattern, and what the different subregions of Bengal indicate may call into question the model of the pan-Indian decline of urban centres at the close of the early historical period.[84] In the subregion of the lower delta, the life-span of what are considered its urban characteristics—revealed by finds on non-local pottery types, terracotta specimens, coins, beads of varieties of material and so on—did not extend beyond the close of the early historical period. One can therefore talk in terms of decline in the context of this specific subregion. Elsewhere, while the Gupta and the late Gupta phases at Bangarh in north Bengal mark a period of slump only to experience revival on a noticeable scale in the Pāla–Sena period, the period between the fifth-sixth and ninth-tenth centuries was culturally the most significant at Karṇasuvarṇa. Within the compass of an essay it is not possible to elaborate on this point, but it seems that the cultural chronology of the urban centres of early Bengal, or for that matter that of the urban centres in early India in general, cannot be examined in isolation from the overall historical context of the settlement region in which the urban centre/centres were located or from the network of their linkages, long distance as well as local.

Notes and References

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1. In using such terms as 'early historical' and 'early medieval', the chronological categories which are currently in use among historians, are being followed. Early historical archaeology, by convention, has come to encompass archaeology of several culture phases, extending approximately from the sixth-fifth century BC to the third-fourth–fifth-sixth century AD. What may be meant by 'early medieval archaeology' is not yet at all clear.
2. Some general works dealing with this phenomenon may be cited: A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India* (Simla, 1973); V.K. Thakur, *Urbanisation in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1981); R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (New Delhi, 1983), chs. v–vii; G. Erdosy, *Urbanisation in Early Historic India* (BAR International Series 430) (Oxford, 1983); Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities* (Delhi, 1995).

3. The term 'second urbanization' has been used with reference to the urbanization of the Ganga basin to separate it from Harappan or Indus valley urbanization. 'Secondary urbanization' should not be confused with this term. 'Secondary urbanization' which is being borrowed from the concept of 'Secondary states' (see Morton H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology*, New York, 1967, pp. 240–1 for briefly introducing the concept) would only point to the emergence of urban characteristics in initially peripheral areas through processes generated by regular interaction with the epicentre.
4. While stressing that 'a city must be more than a mere conglomeration of people', M.I. Finley remarks: 'Neither geographers nor sociologists nor historians have succeeded in agreeing on a definition. Yet we all know sufficiently what we mean by the label, in general terms: no one will dispute that there was a city of Athens which was both physically and conceptually distinct from the city-state of Athens. The block in definition arises from the difficulties, apparently insuperable, of incorporating all the essential variables without excluding whole periods of history in which we all know cities existed and, on the other hand, of settling for a least common denominator without lodging on a level of generality that serves no useful purpose,' M.I. Finley, 'The Ancient City: From Fustal de Coulanges to Max Weber and Beyond', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 19 (1977), pp. 305, 307–8.
5. See ch. 1 ('The Urban and Rural Setting') in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising at Romans 1579–1580* (translated by Mary Feeney, Harmondsworth, 1981); also ch. 6 ('Explaining the System: The Towns') in F. Braudel, *The Identity of France*, vol. 1 (History and Environment) (translated from the French by Sian Reynolds, London, 1989).
6. Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 1, pp. 179ff.
7. Relevant literature on this debate will include: R.S. Sharma, 'Iron and Urbanisation in the Ganga Basin', review of A. Ghosh, op. cit., *The Indian Historical Review*, 1 (1974), pp. 98–103; N.R. Ray, 'Technology and Social Change in Early Indian History: A Note Posing a Theoretical Question', *Puratattva*, 8 (1976), pp. 132–8; Dilip K. Chakrabarti, 'Beginning of Iron and Social Change in India', *India Studies: Past and Present*, 14 (1972–3), pp. 329–38 and idem., *Theoretical Issues in Indian Archaeology* (Delhi, 1989), ch. 5.
8. G. Erdosy, op. cit.; Dilip K. Chakrabarti (*Theoretical Issues*, p. 79) advances the curious proposition that 'there is some possibility of the beginning of urban growth in the Painted Grey Ware level itself'. This is a supposition which is based on the presence of 'positive settlement hierarchy in this level', although it does not attempt to clarify why 'positive settlement hierarchy' cannot be present in a non-urban agrarian context. Chakrabarti himself asserts (p. 80) 'that the causative factor of the early historic urban

growth lay principally in the formation of states or organized political units in northern India, as reflected in the sixteen *mahājanapadas* or major principalities'. The implication of this statement from one who is chary of correlation between archaeological and literary evidence would be formation of states in the chronological span represented by the 'Painted Grey Ware level' an assumption to which few may like to subscribe. Finally, the 'possibility of the beginning of urban growth' may have been present in the PGW context; logically, it does not necessarily follow that some PGW settlements had already begun to acquire urban dimensions and characteristics.

9. R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 4–8.
10. For example, R.S. Sharma's *Urban Decay* which surveys sites distributed over the entire subcontinent.
11. Amita Ray, 'Urbanisation in Bengal', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 48th session, Goa, 1987.
12. Sharma refers to 'nearly 140 urban sites' (p. 8) which have been excavated but it is not at all clear from his survey that all the sites conform to the various criteria he himself has set forth. Amita Ray ('Urbanisation in Bengal') does not attempt to define what urban is and is inclined to consider any archaeological site (for example, a Buddhist *vihāra* site like Paharpur) as urban.
13. G. Erdosy, 'Early Historic Cities of Northern India', *South Asian Studies*, 3 (1987), pp. 1–23; idem., *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, passim.
14. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Theoretical Issues*, pp. 77ff.
15. This point may be elucidated by comparing functions of centres like Nalanda with those of centres like Taxila or Mathura. Such comparisons are indeed necessary for avoiding indiscriminate characterization of all settlement sites as urban.
16. I would consider it very appropriate to quote the remarks of A.K.M. Shamsul Alam in this context: 'The recent excavations on the slopes of the Mainamati hill have also not exposed yet any secular building which could be identified with the site of the old city. The remains so far discovered are all of a religious character. If no secular building is discovered among the ruins of Mainamati hill in future, then, probably, we have to look for it within "a few miles" of the hill ranges. It may even be buried under the present Comilla town. Here some antiquities, mostly stone sculptures, terracotta plaques and building debris were discovered at the time of construction of the old court buildings which indicate that the modern town of Comilla stands on the remains of some ancient city. It is not unlikely that the ancient city of Pattikera is now buried under the modern buildings of the town.' A.K.M. Shamsul Alam, *Mainamati*, Department of Archaeology and Museums (2nd edition, Dacca, 1982), p. 23.
17. For concrete examples refer to the relevant information cited for Mahasthan and Karṇasuvarṇa.

18. For earlier use of this idea, see 'Transition to the Early Historical Phase in the Deccan: A Note', in B.M. Pande and B.D. Chattopadhyaya (eds), *Archaeology and History: Essays in Memory of A. Ghosh* (New Delhi, 1987), vol. II, pp. 727–32; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Mathura from the Śuṅga to the Kuṣāṇa Period: An Historical Outline', in Doris Srinivasan (ed.), *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 19–30.
19. Subphases within this broad chronological span are envisaged, but the current practice is to label these subphases not in cultural terms but in dynastic terms, viz., Maurya, Śuṅga, Kuṣāṇa, etc. While it would be difficult to find an alternative to the current dynastic terminologies which are taken to correspond to distinct cultural phases at archaeological sites, they are found to be highly unsatisfactory when applied to specific regional contexts.
20. For a general idea regarding subregional divisions of the northern and western parts of Bengal, see R.L. Singh (ed.), *India: A Regional Geography* (Varanasi, reprinted 1987), ch. 6; B.M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal* (University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1970), pp. 6–13.
21. Information on Mahasthan is collected, unless otherwise stated, from: Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Mahasthan: A Preliminary Report of the Recent Archaeological Excavations at Mahasthangarh*, Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Bangladesh (Dacca, 1975). For the region of Mahasthan, see also A.K.M. Zakariah, *Bāṅgladeśer Pratnasampad* (in Bengali) (Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, 1984), pp. 171ff.
22. Information on Bangarh is collected from: K.G. Goswami, *Excavations at Bangarh (1938–41)*, Asutosh Museum Memoir No. 1 (University of Calcutta, 1948).
23. For a recent discussion on the rural settlements of north Bengal mentioned in Gupta period inscriptions, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990), ch. 2; also B.M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions*, pp. 28–31, 84–91.
24. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I (2nd edition, University of Calcutta, 1965), pp. 79–80.
25. There is a recent suggestion to the effect that ancient mounds such as Chalaner *dhap*, Dhata Tarar *dhap*, Naria *dhap*, Godhar *dhap*, located in the village of Palasbari, in close proximity to Mahasthangarh may represent the cluster of villages called Palāṣavṛndaka mentioned in the Damodarpur copperplate of Budhagupta. See Mohammad Ali and S.B. Bhattacharjee, *Archaeological Survey Report: Bogra District*, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Bangladesh (Dacca, 1986), p. 13.
26. Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Mahasthan*, p. 1. However, the radius will probably be much more if mounds distributed to the east of the Karatoya are included.

See Mohammad Ali and S.B. Bhattacharjee, *Archaeological Survey Report: Bogra District*, passim.

27. Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Mahasthan*, p. 1. 'The east–west stretch of the rampart is, however, 4000', according to K.N. Dikshit, 'Excavations in Bengal', *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India: 1928–29* (Delhi, 1933), p. 88.
28. Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Mahasthan*, preface.
29. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, 1, p. 80.
30. Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Mahasthan*, p. 30.
31. Ibid., pp. 31, 33, 34, 39, 44, etc.
32. K.G. Goswami, *Excavations at Bangarh*, p. 2.
33. See D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, 1, pp. 291, 293.
34. K.G. Goswami, *Excavations at Bangarh*, pp. 5, 8ff.
35. Ibid., pp. 11, 34.
36. Ibid., pp. 9, 35.
37. The crucial importance of the Varendra region to the Pālas is evident from the way Rāmpāla's eulogy *Ramacaritam* eulogizes Varendra. See R.C. Majumdar, R.G. Basak and Pt. Nanigopal Banerji (eds & trs), *The Rāmacaritam of Sandhyakaranandin* (Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, 1939), especially, ch. 3.
38. The cultural sequence available for Tāmralipti is however different from that at Chandraketugarh in that it reaches back to the neolithic phase. However, the advent of urban features at both sites begins, as it does elsewhere, with the phase associated with the Mauryas, although in the physical profile of the settlements in Bengal in general, there is hardly anything urban in the Mauryan phase.
39. The literature on Tāmralipti, both primary and secondary, is voluminous and does not need to be listed here. For certain interesting suggestions advanced in them, the following comparatively recent publications may be cited: Niharranjan Ray, 'Tamralipta and Gange:.Two Port-Cities of Ancient Bengal and Connected Considerations', *Geographical Review of India*, 41–3 (1979), pp. 205–22; K. Rudra, 'Tamralipta and Its Locational Problem', in Amita Ray and Samir Mukherjee (eds), *Historical Archaeology of India: A Dialogue between Archaeologists and Historians* (New Delhi, 1990), pp. 245–54. For Chandraketugarh, a general statement giving a resumé of the excavation work is provided by K.G. Goswami, 'Chandraketugarh and Its Archaeological Importance', *The Indian Museum Bulletin*, no. 1 (1966), pp. 42–6. Brief reports on annual excavations at Chandraketugarh are available in: *Indian Archaeology: A Review*, years 1956–7 through to years 1965–6.
40. K.G. Goswami, 'Chandraketugarh and Its Archaeological Importance', p. 43.
41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.
43. *Indian Archaeology 1965–66: A Review*, p. 60.
44. Ibid.
45. For excavations conducted on limited scales at Tāmralipti, see *Indian Archaeology 1954–55: A Review*, pp. 19–20; *Indian Archaeology 1973–74 A Review*, p. 33.
46. B.N. Mukherjee, 'East Indian Kharoṣṭi' (unpublished paper); also, idem., *Kharoṣṭi and Kharoṣṭi-Brāhmī Inscriptions in West Bengal (India)*, (Calcutta, 1990).

46a. It seems that Period III of the excavations of 1954–5 would correspond to Period IV of 1973–4 excavations.

47. K. Rudra, 'Tamralipta and Its Locational Problem'.
48. Ibid., p. 248.

48a. The nature of the antiquities found at Wari-Bateshwar may however point to the existence of an early historical settlement in this geographical region; see Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Ancient Bangladesh: A Study of the Archaeological Sources* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 56–60. For a recent brief report of tribal excavation at Wari-Bateshwar, giving an approximate chronology of *c.* 700 BC–second century AD, see E. Hague, *et al.*, 'A Preliminary Report of Wari-Bateshwar Trial Excavation by ICSBA', *Journal of Bengal Art*, vol. 5, (2000), pp. 283–315.

48b. For distribution pattern of proto-historic culture sites, see Arun Kumar Nag, 'Spatial Analysis of Pre-and Proto-historic Sites in Ajay-Damodar Valley', in B.M. Pande and B.D. Chattopadhyaya (eds), *Archaeology and History: Essays in Memory of A. Ghosh*, pp. 265–80.

49. See Dilip K. Chakrabarti, A.K. Nag and Subrata Chakrabarti, 'An Archaeological Reconnaissance in Birbhum', *Puratattva*, vol. 10 (1978–9), p. 31.
50. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, I, p. 351.
51. K.N. Dikshit, 'The Identification of Pushkarana Mentioned in the Susunia Inscription of Chandravarman', in H. Hargreaves (ed.), *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1927–28*, pp. 188–9. Dikshit remarks: 'It is still a considerably large village and its antiquity is attested by the fact that the houses in several quarters of the village are built on the top of mounds, formed by the ruined heaps of older habitations . . . It is very likely that the place dates back from the early Gupta period, and thus be considered to be the Pushkarṇa of Susunia inscription, the capital of King Chandravarman, son of Simhavarman, the extent of whose dominions may have been more or less coterminous with the ancient Radha country or south-west Bengal.' The possibility that the site dates to the pre-Gupta period is suggested by objects collected from the site subsequently; R.K. Chattopadhyaya, 'Prehistoric and Early Historic Archaeology of West Bengal', M. Phil. dissertation (Delhi University, 1982), pp. 139–40.

52. Three brief notes, all published by Amita Ray, on the results of Mangalkot excavations have been consulted: (1) material on Mangalkot used in 'Urbanisation in Bengal', loc. cit.; (2) 'Mangalkot: An Ancient Township—Its History and Archaeology', in Debala Mitra and Gauriswar Bhattacharyya (eds), *N.K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume* (Nalinīkānta Śatavārṣikī) (Delhi, 1989), pp. 285–91; (3) 'Archaeology of Mangalkot', in Amita Ray and Samir Mukherjee (eds), *Historical Archaeology of India*, pp. 132–40. These notes suffer from several curious inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Some of these need to be noted:
    (a) According to the note published in *N.K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume* (pp. 285–6), the site of Mangalkot consists of several scattered mounds, one of which, Vikramadityer *dhibi*, was selected for excavation. The note mentions that the mound is an extensive one and stretches 'almost 2 square kilometres'. In the note published in *Historical Archaeology of India*, the total site of Mangalkot is stated to comprise 'several mouzas and roughly 2 sq. km. area' (p. 131). These statements do not give a clear idea of the total area over which the archaeological site extends.
    (b) The total cultural span of Mangalkot varies from one page to another; in the note appearing in *N.K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume* on p. 285 it ranges from 'about the tenth-eleventh century BC to the most recent past'; on p. 288 the beginning of the cultural sequence is traced back to '13th/12th century BC'.
    (c) The rather amazing statement that 'the people living in Chalcolithic phase were sufficiently aware of the use of iron' (*N.K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume*, p. 286) is made with reference to Period I. However, in 'Urbanisation in Bengal' (p. 3) Period I, which is chalcolithic, is marked by the absence of iron; it is in Period II, which too is termed chalcolithic, that iron makes its appearance.
53. Amita Ray, 'Mangalkot: An Ancient Township', *N.K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume*.
54. Ibid.
55. Based on impressions of personal visit to and exploration of the site.
56. In 'Urbanisation in Bengal' Amita Ray dates the genesis of urbanization at Mangalkot in Period IV which preceded the Śuṅga–Kuṣāṇa level; one may therefore assume that the genesis of urbanization has to be located in the Maurya period and that the Maurya period corresponds to Period IV at Mangalkot. However, in 'Mangalkot: An Ancient Township' (*N.K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume*), the Śuṅga period, which is separated from the Kuṣāṇa period, corresponds to Period IV (the Maurya period having been made to correspond to Period III) and the Śuṅga period is inaccurately put within the time-bracket: first century BC to first century AD.
57. Sukumar Sen (ed.), *Caṇḍīmaṅgala* (in Bengali) (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1975), p. 278. Dhanapati, one of the central characters of the work,

was a resident of Mangalkot and introduced himself in one place in the following terms:

Gandhavaṇik Jāti deś Gauḍ nām
Vasati Maṅgalkoṭ Ujāni grām

Throughout the work, however, Ujāni is mentioned as a *nagarī*.

58. Amita Ray, 'Mangalkot: An Ancient Township', p. 287.
59. See notes 76, 77.
60. Niharranjan Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās, Ādi Parva* (3rd edition, Calcutta, 1980), pp. 401–3.
61. This seems to be the thrust of the argument of V.K. Thakur who underlines the significance of religious structures at the urban centres and takes them as examples of 'non-commercial township' surviving under the aegis of the Pālas, V.K. Thakur, 'Archaeology of Early Medieval Towns in Bengal', *Puratattva*, no. 12 (1983), pp. 140–4. The argument, on the face of it, may receive support from such statements as are made, for example, with reference to Mahasthan: '. . . . the proportion of secular buildings appears to have dwindled down after the town of the late Gupta period fell into ruins', N.K. Dikshit, 'Excavations in Bengal', *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India; 1928–29* (Delhi, 1933), p. 97. Apart from the fact that the most impressive structures in any early medieval settlement were likely to be in the form of temples, the exposure of a fraction of the settlement area alone is hardly adequate to give a satisfactory picture of a shift from secular to sacred settlement.
62. R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, pp. 57–9.
63. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c. 300–1200* (University of Calcutta, 1965), pp. 105–6; Niharranjan Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, pp. 393ff.
64. Ibid., pp. 288–90. However, all Pāla period fortresses mentioned by Sharma are located in Bihar, the easternmost being at Antichak.
65. Amita Ray, 'Urbanisation in Bengal', p. 47.
66. Ibid.
67. See, for example, *Indian Archaeology 1954–55: A Review* (New Delhi, 1955), pp. 19–20; for epigraphic references to villages and their distribution in the lower delta, see maps on pages 41, 44, 47, 51 in B.M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions*.
68. B.M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions*, maps on pages 32, 36.
69. For geographical divisions of early Bengal, see R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Bengal*, vol. I; also Niharranjan Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, pp. 84–165.
70. See M.R. Tarafdar, 'Trade and Society in Early Medieval Bengal', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1978), pp. 274–86. Of course, Tarafdar believes that this 'kind of commercial activities . . . could hardly originate a process of urbanization that might bring into being a stable commercialized middle class, for profits from trade were either appropriated by the foreign

merchants or frittered away by lords or establishments' (p. 286). One wonders how this statement can be reconciled with his reference to a number of towns located along the river routes and 'functioning as centres of trade and commerce' from the early fourteenth century (p. 285, fn. 1).

71. For references, see Niharranjan Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās*, pp. 365–408; also Amita Ray, 'Urbanisation in Bengal'.
72. The key position held by Vikramapura in the history of early medieval Bengal is suggested by the number of land grants which were issued from it. See maps on pages 40, 44, 47 in B.M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*. For an idea of the extent of the area in which archaeological remains of Vikramapura are expected to be distributed, see A.K.M. Zakariah, *Bāṅglādeser Pratnasampad*, pp. 406–10.
73. The *Rāmacaritam*, eulogizing Pāla king Rāmapāla, refers to him as the builder of 'The city of (Rāmāvatī) which rivalled Amaravati'. The poem not only gives conventional description of the physical and other attributes of the city but also of the urban centres of Varendra in general terms: '(In Varendrī) the beauty of the cities was charming on account of the excessive grace (of symmetry) in the rows of the white palaces, where the huge expanses of clouds stuck to the extremities of the groups of golden pitchers placed high (on the palace tops)', R.C. Majumdar, R.G. Basak and Pt. Nanigopal Banerji (eds & trs), *The Rāmacaritam of Sandhyākaranandin*, pp. 96ff.
74. S.R. Das, *Rajbadidanga: 1962 (Chiruti, Jadupur). An Interim Report on Excavations at Rajbadidanga and Terracotta Seals and Sealings* (The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1968). Among the objects found during the excavations, the following may be considered to be of immense significance for suggesting the nature of Karṇasuvarṇa's territorial linkages:
    (a) a seal bearing Greek letters (Horae?) in association with sealings datable to sixth–eighth century, pp. 60, 63, 68;
    (b) seals and sealings with close affinities with finds at Paharpur, Nalanda, Ratnagiri, Mainamati and so on (pp. 56ff.) In addition, it may be recalled that Raktamṛttikā with which Karṇasuvarṇa is identified finds mention in an inscription, written in southern Brāhmī of about the fifth century, from Malay Peninsula as the place from which hailed the great sailor (*mahānāvika*) Buddhagupta (pp. 57–8).
75. L.D. Barnett, 'Vappaghoshavata Grant of Jayanaga', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 18 (1925–6) (reprinted, New Delhi, 1983), pp. 60–4.
76. S.R. Das, *Rajbadidanga*, p. 42.
77. Ibid.

77a. For distribution of sites in the region, see S.R. Das, *Archaeological Discoveries from Murshidabad (West Bengal)*, part I (The Asiatic Society's Monograph Series XIX) (Calcutta, 1971), pp. 16–25.

78. S.R. Das, *Rajbadidanga*, p. 8.

79. Ibid., p. 22.
80. Ibid., p. 18.
81. Ibid., pp. 24–5.
82. Ibid., p. 43.
83. Ibid.

83a. In the study of an urban settlement it should be important to know how its different segments related to one another. Anurādhāpura which was the capital of ancient Sri Lanka for centuries and which 'in certain respects . . . represents the demarcation of space on the basis of social criteria' provides an excellent example of how different segments of a city and their interrelationship can be profitably studied by historians. See R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, 'Anuradhapura: Ritual, Power and Resistance in a Precolonial South Asian City' and in Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands and Christopher Tilley (eds), *Domination and Resistance* (London, 1989), pp. 155–78; also idem., 'The Pre-colonial City in South Asia', in Y. Tsubouchi (ed.), *The Formation of Urban Civilization in South-East Asia* (Kyoto University, 1989), pp. 1–51.

84. R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, passim.

(Addendum: We have had no access so far to the report on recent excavations at Mahasthan in Bangladesh.)

Texts and Historical Issues

CHAPTER 6

The City in Early India: Perspectives from Texts

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The City in Early India: Perspectives from Texts*

Prologue

In a brilliant article titled 'Toward an Anthology of City Images', A.K. Ramanujan pointed out how literature provides a 'repertoire of perceptions otherwise not available', and how one can, going beyond the 'apparent conventionality of description', reach close to the 'poets' grasp of structural relations and their entailments in the details of experience'. Ramanujan's own analysis of three cities, as they figure in two classical Indian texts, is illuminating.[1] To him, Ayodhyā of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* represents the details of an 'ideal city'. Although one could compare the details of Vālmīki's description with the modern sociological attributes of an ancient city, the really significant point, Ramanujan pointed out, is that the well-planned city of Ayodhyā as described by Vālmīki 'matches the moral order and the well-planned hierarchy of the society it houses'. The moral order derived from its ruler who gave the city its 'orthogenetic' character. By contrast, Puhār, the littoral city of the Tamil country in the epic *Silappadikāram*,[2] was 'heterogenetic'; the order it represented was not a moral order but 'a technical order, an environment for both good and evil'. Madurai, also of *Silappadikāram*, was another variant—a unitary city which was protected but corrupt, and unlike Puhār, was closed and positively inhospitable to outsiders.

Although in the final part of his article Ramanujan strayed into a speculative, exploratory field of attributing city types in literature to

*Reprinted from *Studies in History*, 13, 2, n.s. (1997). I am grateful to Professor B. Kölver for having patiently gone through this essay and for his comments. We both still remain puzzled over many aspects of the *Arthaśāstra* evidence.

In introducing long extracts, in translation, from literary texts in the text of the essay, I have taken A.K. Ramanujan's paper (see fn. 1) as a useful convention to follow.

differences between 'non-regional' Sanskrit and 'natural' Tamil, his insights open up possibilities for further probings into texts for understanding various dimensions of the city in early India. This essay attempts to explore a select range of early texts in order to understand how the city was viewed and situated within the parameters of early Indian culture.

References to cities abound in early Indian texts from about the fifth/fourth century BC onward, but this essay is not concerned with either a comprehensive listing of such references, or with a comprehensive coverage of early texts. Cities appear in vivid colours in some texts more than in others, and it is a few texts of the former category that I have chosen to provide extracts from and to view from diverse angles. Also, the present exercise is not intended to complement work on 'historical' cities which are known from archaeology, inscriptions and literature;[3] perspectives from literature cannot be a substitute for research on processes of urbanization, urban morphology and demography, urban material culture and such other facets of the city which literature is not really concerned with. Literature only tells us more eloquently than even other written sources such as inscriptions, about the 'citi-ness' of the city beyond its physical contours. It is a search for this 'citi-ness' of the city, rather than typologies of the city, that is behind the present exercise. The exercise, it must be repeated, is very much exploratory and ventures to suggest only a few ways of looking at the material.

The City and Hierarchized Differentiation of Space

The city stands out as a city in relation to other forms of human habitation in the texts; the difference may have been expressed in the form of a distinction, between the *pura* and *janapada*,[4] that is, between the city and the countryside, or in the form of a continuum. Though the distinction between the city and the country is often highlighted, at an early stage of its representation, the city or the *nagara* is usually found at one end of a continuum, the continuum being expressed almost in the form of a formulae: *gāma, nigama, nagara*.[5] The continuum is, of course, evidence of a notion of hierarchy and the recognition of the existence of hierarchy in space, in situations where cities exist. This is what seems to be conveyed in the following paragraph in *Cakkavatti-Sihānanda-Suttānta* with reference to an ideal age when human beings would live up to 80,000 years:

> Among such humans this India (*Jambudvīpa*) will be mighty and prosperous, the villages, towns and royal cities would be so close that a cock could fly from each one to the next. Among such humans, this India . . . will be pervaded by mankind even as a jungle is by reeds and rushes. Among such humans, the Benares of our day will be named Ketumatī; a royal city, mighty and prosperous, full of people, crowded and well-fed. Among such humans in this India there will be eighty thousand towns, with Ketumatī, the royal city at their head.[6]

In the ideal age, when human life would be long, the ideal space would be congested, not simply in terms of human beings living close to one another ('as reeds and rushes in a jungle'), but also in terms of closeness of settlements of which the central place, the royal city, would represent the apex.

Literature thus gives two initial impressions about the city. As an apex centre, it is not at a distance from other settlements; in other words, the essence of the city is in its centrality in the togetherness of settlements. Also, there is a graded hierarchy, between village, town and royal city, and not just a sharp distinction between the village and the city.

The graded hierarchy existed among cities as well. Ketumatī of *Cakkavatti-Sihānanda-Suttānta* was the supreme city; there is a reference, which we shall cite later, to a city called *Sārvabhauma-nagara* in a later text. There may also have been the notion of several *mahānagaras*, which could be distinguished not only from other *nagaras* but other categories of *nagaras* as well. In the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttānta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Ānanda, Buddha's devoted disciple, pleads with Buddha to take his *parinirvāṇa* in a city which would correspond to his exalted status:

> Let not the exalted one die in this little wattle-and-daub town, in this town in the midst of the jungle, in this branch township. For, Lord, there are other great cities such as Champā, Rājagaha, Sāvatthi, Sāketa, Kosāmbi and Benares. Let the Exalted one die in one of them. There are many wealthy nobles and brahmins and heads of houses, believers in the Tathāgata, who will pay due honours to the remains of the Tathāgata.[7]

The wattle-and-daub town, the town in the midst of the jungle and the branch town of this excerpt, like *nigama*, were different categories of urban centres and were held as different from the *mahānagaras*. But among *mahānagaras* too there could be space for a supreme city—a *Sārvabhauma-nagara*—and Buddha's prediction about Pāṭaliputra, which in his time was still Pāṭaligrāma, a village, points further to the notional

ordering of urban settlements in terms of hierarchy: 'Aṇḍ as far, Ānanda, as Aryan people resort—as far as merchants travel, this will become the chief city Pātaliputra, a centre for the interchange of all kinds of ware.'[8]

The notion of hierarchy seems to be a part of the schema of space organization even in a normative text like the *Arthaśāstra*.[9] The *Arthaśāstra's* conception of a city is to be found in a *prakaraṇa* called *Durganiveśa*, but the *Durganiveśa* should not be taken up for analysis by separating it completely from the *prakaraṇas* preceding it. *Durganiveśa* follows the *prakaraṇa* on *Durgavidhānam* which is concerned with the construction of frontier forts in four directions,[10] and with the layout of a *sthānīya*—a settlement in the centre of the country (*janapada-madhye*) which was to be designed as 'the headquarters for revenue, on a site recommended by experts in the science of building'. The *prakaraṇa* on *Durgavidhānam* in turn follows the *prakaraṇa* on *Janapadaniveśa* (settlement of the countryside) and *Bhūmicchidra-vidhānam*, the latter with a clear accent on the creation and maintenance of forests. *Durganiveśa* may thus be seen to highlight the distinct character of the planned-out royal city, different from the *janapada*, that is, pasture land and forest, but the impression of an ordered hierarchy nevertheless comes through from the manner in which the text has organized its information on space.

The City: Perspectives on the Structure of Space

Whatever the composition and character of the spatial segments within a city, the image of the city, as it is generally available, is that of a carefully planned space. Insistence on planning is not typical of a normative text like the *Arthaśāstra* alone; in other texts too the significance of the work of the laying out of a city is found comparable to the practice of an 'earnest student of yoga'. This is what the *Milinda Pañha*, a Pāli text, the core of which is believed to have been composed between 100 BC and AD 200, tells us:

> As . . . a city architect, when he wants to build a city, first has a site for the city cleared, and has it levelled when the stumps of the trees and the thorns have been removed, and builds the city after that and after he has planned the distribution of carriage roads, the squares and the places where three or four roads meet—even so, sire, the earnest student of yoga, depending on moral habit and based on moral habit, develop[s] the five controlling faculties . . .[11]

Indeed, *Milinda Pañha*'s city of excellence Sākala, with all its 'lovely scene of rivers, mountain slopes and wood', was laid out 'by knowledgeable men'; 'well laid out were its carriage roads, crossroads, squares and

the places where three or four roads meet . . . strong were its watchtowers and ramparts, its splendid and noble arches curving over the city gates; the palace was surrounded by a deep moat and pale encircling walls'.[12]

As one would expect, a normative text detailed the layout of a city whose structure would conform to the political and social ideals of the text. The *Arthaśāstra* envisages what may be considered, although not clearly spelt out as, a capital city in the form of a *Durganiveśa*.[13] In its structure, the *durga* was very different[14] from other kinds of forts and from a *sthānīya*, which the *Arthaśāstra* deals with in some detail, as a prelude leading up to the section titled *Durganiveśa*. Within the *durga*, of prime importance was the residential zone. The *Arthaśāstra* starts with the layout of the *Vāstuvibhāga* (residential zone) by referring to three royal highways to the east and three to the north (*trayaḥ prācīnā rāja-mārgāstrayaḥ udīcīnā iti Vāstuvibhāga*). The components of the residential zone were thus to be distributed within a grid pattern layout. The area, marked off as *Vāstuvibhāga* within the *durga*, had many outlets in the form of twelve gates; the zone, moreover, necessarily required adequate provision for water, drains and underground passages.

Two things about the residential zone seem striking. One, nothing is marked especially as its centre, as the residential zone itself was not marked as the centre of the *durga*—neither the royal residence (*rājani-veśa*), nor a ceremonial centre. Two, the location of the royal residence was not in an exclusive zone in terms of strictly segregated distribution of varṇa. There was a distinct two-tier hierarchy so far as distribution of space components in the residential division was concerned, but, as we shall presently see, the hierarchy was not strictly in terms of varṇa. The building site for the royal residence was enjoined to be in a place fit for the four varṇas to live on (*cāturvarṇya samājīve*); it also had to have a particular orientation—it had to face either the north or the east, having been located 'in the ninth part to the north of the heart of the residential area' (*vāstuhṛdaya*). Components of the *Vāstuvibhāga*, of which the *rāja-niveśa* or *antaḥpura* was assumed to be the centre, had each a prescribed spatial relationship with the centre. In one direction, in the north-by-east (*pūrvottara*), closest to the *antaḥpura* was the component of the preceptor and the chaplain, places for sacrifice, water and councillors; the kitchen, elephant stable and the *koṣṭhāgāra* were to be located in the south-by-east (*pūrvadakṣiṇa*). Beyond these was the place for dealers in perfumes, flowers and liquids, and of makers of toilet articles; the Kṣatriyas were assigned the eastern direction. Closest to the royal residence in the east-by-south part (*dakṣiṇapūrvaṃ bhāgaṃ*) were to be located the storehouse for goods, the records and audit office, and workmen's quarters; the

west-by-south part (*dakṣiṇapaścimaṃ bhāgaṃ*) was to be reserved as a storehouse for forest produce and the armoury. Beyond these, the space was allocated to grain dealers of the city, workshop officials, army officers, dealers in cooked food, wine and meat, courtesans and dancers. The Vaiśyas were assigned the southern direction.

In the west, the arrangement of space was to be thus: closest to the royal residence, in the south-by-west (*paścima-dakṣiṇaṃ bhāgaṃ*) were to be stables for donkeys and camels, as also the workshop; in the north-by-west (*paścimottaraṃ bhāgaṃ*) were to be located structures for carriages and chariots. Beyond these, the space was assigned to workers in wool, yarn, bamboo, leather, armours, weapons and shields. The Śūdras were to live in the west. In the north, the sections mentioned first are: in the west-by-north (*uttara-paścimaṃ bhāgaṃ*) rooms for wares and medicines(?), and in the east-by-north part (*uttarapūrvaṃ bhāgaṃ*), treasury, cattle and horses. Beyond these were to be located tutelary deities of the city and of the king, and workers in jewels and metals. The Brāhmaṇas were assigned the northern part.

The *Arthaśāstra* does not make it clear whether the total complex consisting of all these components corresponds to the entire *Vāstuvibhāga*; the actual layout is designed by making the *rājaniveśa* or *antaḥpura* the constant reference point and distributing the components of the complex by dividing the cardinal directions into the following twelve parts: *pūrvottara, pūrvadakṣiṇa, pūrva, dakṣiṇa-pūrva, dakṣiṇa-paścima, dakṣiṇa, paścima-dakṣiṇa, paścimottara, paścima, uttara-paścima, uttara-pūrva, uttara*. Diagramatically, the complex may be represented as shown in Figure 6.1.

From the regular use of the expression *tataḥ param* (namely, beyond the segments of *Vāstuvibhāga*, specified in terms of social groups located in them), in describing the arrangement and composition of space components, some close to the royal complex, others beyond them, a deliberate two-tier hierarchy of space allotment may be seen. The structural units of the royal residence are not enumerated, but since the royal residence was to face either the north or the east, it would appear that it would open out to and, therefore, be accessible only through the residential zone of the Brāhmaṇas or that of the Kṣatriyas. However, although the four varṇas are assigned their respective residential areas in four cardinal directions, the spatial proximity of the four varṇas is built into the layout because *Vāstuvibhāga* is not simply about residence but also about how residence can merge with work and functional structures. Figure 6.1 shows clearly that Kauṭilya could not have intended the varṇas

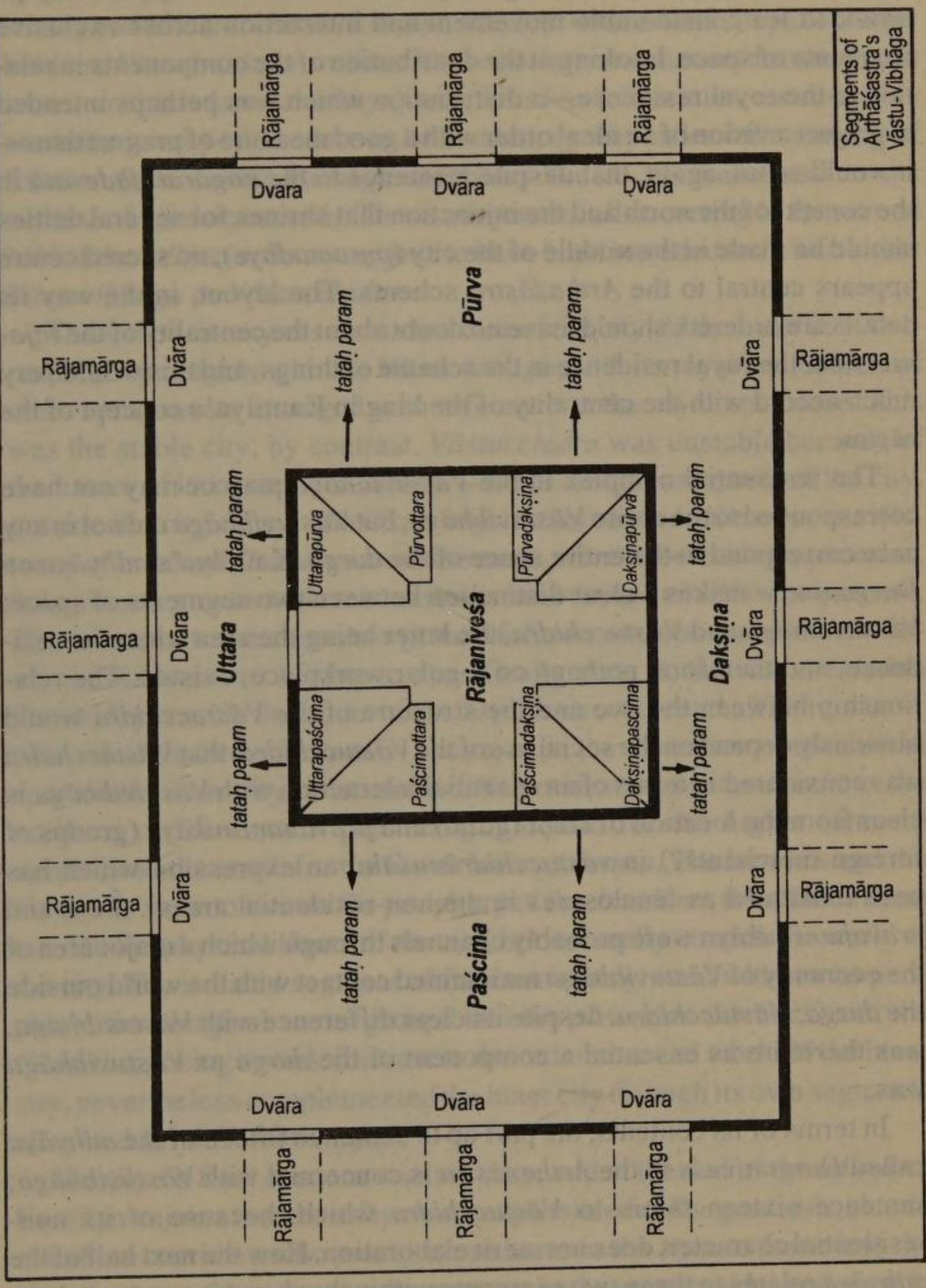
Segments of Arthāśastra's Vāstu-Vibhāga
Rājamārga
Dvāra
Pūrva
tataḥ param
Uttarapūrva
Pūrvottara
Pūrvadakṣiṇa
Dakṣiṇapūrva
Uttara
Rājaniveśa
Dakṣiṇa
Uttarapaścima
Paścimottara
Paścimadakṣiṇa
Dakṣiṇapascima
Paścima

Figure 6.1

to be confined to their exclusive residential zones alone. If, for example, the dealers in perfumes, flowers and liquids, and makers of articles of toilet were located in the area beyond north-by-east and south-by-east, and if the Kṣatriyas were assigned the east, then obviously the layout provided for considerable movement and interaction across exclusive segments of space. Looking at the distribution of the components in relation to the royal residence—a distribution which was perhaps intended to project a vision of an ideal order with a good measure of pragmatism—it would seem, again, that despite reference to the *nagararājadevatā* in the context of the north and the injunction that shrines for several deities should be made in the middle of the city (*puramadhye*), no sacred centre appears central to the *Arthaśāstra* schema. The layout, in the way its details are ordered, should leave no doubt about the centrality of the *rājaniveśa* or the royal residence in the scheme of things, and this would very much accord with the centrality of the king in Kauṭilya's concept of the *rāṣṭra*.

The residential complex in the *Vāstuvibhāga* may or may not have corresponded to the entire *Vāstuvibhāga*, but *Vāstuvibhāga* did not in any case correspond to the entire space of the *durga*. Kauṭilya's *adhyāya* on *Durganiveśa* makes a clear distinction between two segments of space: *Vāstuvibhāga* and *Vāstucchidra*, the latter being the area where no residence, and therefore, perhaps no regular workplace, existed. The relationship between the two and the structure of the *Vāstucchidra* would obviously depend on the social use of the *Vāstucchidra*; that *Vāstucchidra* was considered in terms of an essential interaction with *Vāstuvibhāga* is clear from the location of *śreṇī* (guild) and *pravahaṇi-nikāya* (groups of foreign merchants?) in *vāstucchidrānuśāla*, an expression which has been translated as 'enclosures in the non-residential areas'. *Śreṇī* and *pravahani-nikāya* were probably channels through which a major area of the economy of *Vāstuvibhāga* maintained contact with the world outside the *durga; Vāstucchidra*, despite its clear difference with *Vāstuvibhāga*, was therefore as essential a component of the *durga* as *Vāstuvibhāga* was.

In terms of its contents, the part up to sentence fifteen of the *adhyāya* called *Durganiveśa* in the *Arthaśāstra* is concerned with *Vāstuvibhāga*; sentence sixteen refers to *Vāstucchidra* which, because of its non-residential character, does not merit elaboration. How the next half of the *adhyāya* relates to these two segments within the *durga* is not very clear, at least to me. For example, if the *Vāstuvibhāga* was to have twelve gates, reference to four gates—to be presided over by Brāhmaṇ, Indra, Yama

and Senāpati—in sentence nineteen, followed by reference to the area outside the city, may mean that gates were to be in two separate rows, one around the *Vāstuvibhāga* and the other around the *durga*. In terms of spatial arrangement within the *durga*, with its two main segments, *Vāstuvibhāga* and *Vāstucchidra*, it is also not clear where workshops of householders (*Karmāntakṣetravaśena Kuṭumbināṃ*), storehouses for numerous items, or chiefs (*anekamukhya*) with their fourfold armies, mentioned in sentence twenty-nine, were to be located, or why indeed the making of frontier forts (*antapāladurgasaṃskāra*) had to be mentioned in the context of the *durganiveśa*. These references, all occurring in the second half of the *adhyāya*, do not appear to have been intended to fit into either *Vāstuvibhāga* or *Vāstucchidra*.

There then, in any case, was the core of the city, or the inner city, corresponding roughly with the *Vāstuvibhāga*, with its royal enclosure and other components arranged with reference to the royal enclosure. This was the stable city; by contrast, *Vāstucchidra* was unstable because of the nature of its occupation. There was also another segment of the city, outside the city. The *Arthaśāstra* enjoins that outside the city, at a distance of hundred *dhanuṣas* from the moat, were to be made sanctuaries, holy places, groves and embankments, and deities of different quarters. The reference to the cremation ground follows, and one can assume without the *Arthaśāstra* having to specifically state it, that the cremation ground lay outside the limits of the city. Its structure and affiliation however related it to the inner city. Varṇa, as in the allocation of residential space in the inner city, determined differential access to the *śmaśāna*, the northern or the eastern part being allocated for the higher (*uttama*) varṇas, and the south for the lower (*avara*) varṇas. The heretics and the *Caṇḍālas* were to live on the periphery of the *śmaśāna*; this placed them outside the physical limits of the city, but not really outside the world of the city. The isolated segment of the cremation ground with, on its periphery, the marginal social groups like the *pāṣaṇḍas* (heretics) and the *Caṇḍālas* posing a stark contrast to the ordered social world of the inner city, nevertheless complemented the inner city through its own segments allocated for different varṇas.

Kauṭilya's final concern was security, and at the end of the *adhyāya*, Kauṭilya enjoins that the *adhyakṣa*, responsible for *Durganiveśa*, should not allow outsiders who would cause harm to the state to come into the city. Such outsiders 'were to be cast out in the countryside' and were to be 'made to pay all taxes'. Thus, Kauṭilya's vision of a city was that of a protected one, much like, as Ramanujan understands the *Silappadikāram*

evidence, the city of Madurai of the Pāṇḍya chiefs in the extreme south of Tamilaham.[15]

After having gone through the *Arthaśāstra* evidence, one may, however, ask: Are spaces in all cities viewed in terms of the centrality of the royal residence and of security? The perception of the city may well have varied from person to person and what was central in a city could very well be a question of perspective. It is, therefore, necessary to shift from the standard description of a city, with its rampart and moat and the orderly layout of urban space, to a different perspective of its arrangement of space. Let us then turn to the coastal city of Pumpuhār of the Tamil epic *Silappadikāram* on the occasion of its festival of Indra, lord of Gods.[16]

> Let us praise Pukār, this glorious city,
> The fame of its royal seat of kings
> Spread over the whole earth clasped
> By the swelling waters.
> Far famed and inimitable
> Is the City of Pukār, known 'for its ancient families',
> Undisturbed since time immemorial.
> Like the Potiyil or Himālaya, it too remains
> As constant as the great men who adorn it.

Puhār, despite its royal seat, was constant or stable because of the great ancient families which made it so; the *Silappadikāram*, while intermittently giving us glimpses of Puhār, does not dwell on the royal palace. The city has many foci, and when celebrations such as the festival of Indra take place, they all seem to come alive:

> In the city itself stood the kingsway,
> The flagged car street, the market square,
> The boulevard where merchant princes dwelt
> In tall mansions, the brahman homes,
> The houses of landed families and their tenant
> Farmers, of physicians, astrologers, and those employed
> In other tasks, the broad street
> Of the homes of those who with skill bored
> Holes into bright gems, and those who polished
> Ornate couches. In separate houses
> Lived charioteers, bards, panegyrists,
> Astronomers, handsome dancers, harlots,
> Actresses, flower-and-betel girls,
> Maidservants, professional musicians,
> Drummers of various sorts and jesters.

Surrounding the fort were the spacious houses
Of cavalrymen with swift horses, riders
Of male elephants, drivers of lofty chariots,
Fierce-looking soldiers. Celebrated in song
Was this part of town and well known
For the great and renowned men who lived
There. Like a battlefield, where two great
Kings meet, was the open ground
Between the two halves of the city. The dense
Trees as pillars, shops sprang up
As a permanent market place with its untiring clamour
Of buyers and sellers.[17]

Obviously, this incidental description—referring to two halves of the city, with an open space in between, but perhaps not really open because shops had sprung up 'as a permanent market place with its untiring clamour of buyers and sellers'—is totally inadequate for grasping the structure of the vibrant, dynamic space in the city of Puhār. But it is significant that it does speak, without much elaboration, of two parts of the city, one part perhaps represented by its famous fort complex and residences around it, and the other, the market square and the area with varieties of professional groups living in it. Although the text speaks of two parts of the city, there were possibly other segments which needed to be viewed with reference to the city—as parts of it. There was, for example, the harbour:

Near the harbour, the passerby was stopped dead
By the homes of Yavanas whose profits never shrunk.
On the edge of the burnished waters lived
And mingled as one traders from distant
Lands, come for goods carried
By ships . . .[18]

And further:

One saw the fine work of making
Cloth from silk, fur, and cotton
In the weavers quarter. Silk, coral,
Sandalwood, agar, flawless pearls,
Gems, gold, and an endless profusion
Of rare ornaments were piled high
On commodious streets. Heaped separately
Were grains in the street of the grain merchants.
As also a variety of provisions distinct from one
Another. Pedlars of pastry, appam;

Women hawking wine; fishermen
Offering fish for sale; vendors
Of white salt; sellers of betel
Leaves; perfumers; butchers flogging
Different kinds of meat; oilmongers;
Overcrowded shops packed with food;
Braziers, coppersmiths; painters, sculptors;
Goldsmiths; jewellers, tailors; cobblers;
A host of artisans making various
Flawless objects with cloth and pith;
The homes of great musicians . . .
. . . and other workers
Who excelled in the small crafts . . .
All had their homes in the suburbs of the city.[19]

Some idea of the vastness of Puhār, and the immense heterogeneity in the composition of its professional groups, constituted by its different segments, is conveyed also in the 'Bathing in the sea' section of the Book of Puhār, in which Kovalan, the hero of the epic, escorts Mātavī, the courtesan girl with whom he has fallen in love, to the sea: 'They passed through the market street, crowded with mansions/That stored ten million bales of costly merchandise.' Beyond this, 'Kovalan and Mātavī entered the main thoroughfare of the city that prospered from the wealth of the Ocean, and reached the row of streets near the sea/In the lane where grains were heaped like unending waves . . .'[20] This is the region of Puhār, mentioned along with the harbour in detail earlier. One cannot help feeling that the area of the harbour with its heterogeneous population of foreign and local merchants, artisans and professionals of different categories, reached from the city through the main thoroughfare and through other commercial quarters, was like a city in itself—connected to but also by virtue of the speciality of its own linkages, away from the seat of the Cola monarch who symbolized the glory of Tamilaham.

In this expanse of the white sand is the wealth
Brought in ships by men who have voyaged
From their native lands to live there.[21]

Puhār, in Ramanujan's characterization, was an open city which contrasted with cities described according to Sanskrit literary conventions. Literary conventions, however, had to relate to variations in perspective, and to take note of such variations one can perhaps turn away from normative texts or texts projecting an ideal moral order, to texts in which the social universe worth living in, is constituted by a different kind of ordering of elements. In the rest of this essay, I shall be quoting often

from the *Caturbhāṇī*, the four monologue plays in Sanskrit generally assigned to the Gupta period.[22] To start with, I present an excerpt from *Ubhayābhisārikā*, one of the four *Bhāṇas*, which refers to the city of Kusumapura or Pāṭaliputra:

> How wonderful is the supreme beauty of Kusumapura! Here between the rows of houses the streets which are well-watered, well-cleaned, and are scattered over with flower-offerings great and small, look like the (floors of) dwelling houses. And at intervals, shop fronts have become interesting due to the people engaged in buying and selling of various commodities. By the recitation of the Vedas, musical performances, and the twangs of bow-strings palaces are calling, as it were, one another like the ten mouths of Rāvaṇa. Sometimes lightning-like women curious to have a look at the streets, open the windows of cloud-like palaces, and shine like Apsarasas on the Mount Kailāsa. Moreover, important high officers of the King, mounted on family horses, elephants and chariots add to the beauty of the scene. And young serving maids wearing ornaments in proper places are going about with attractive movements . . . daughters of courtesans; the beauty of whose lotus-like faces is drunk by the eyes of all people, are gracefully walking up and down, it seems, to bestow their favour on the thoroughfare. Enough of details.[23]

The excerpt in fact does not provide details of the structure of space of the city of Kusumapura; what it does is to provide a collage of images which represent that space. There is no single focus; the recitation of the Vedas, musical performances, and the twangs of bow-strings, as the hustle-bustle of people engaged in buying and selling of varieties of merchandise (*nānā-vidhānāṃ paṇya-samudayānāṃ kraya-vikraya-vyāpṛta-janena*)—all account for the space of the city. There is reference, not to a single palace, but to *prāsāda-paṃktayaḥ*, 'rows of palaces', calling out to one another. The chiefs among royal officers (*Mahāmātra-mukhyāḥ*) on their horses, elephants and chariots who move on the thoroughfare of the city are a part of this collage as 'moreover' (*api ca*); they are not special landmarks of the frame.

Let me cite incidental 'details' from another *Bhāṇa*, the *Pādatāḍitaka* of Śyāmilaka.[24] A *Viṭa*, an expert in the affairs of love,[25] gets up to the sound of the morning music for the king. He has a problem to resolve; so, he first goes to the quarter of the Brāhmaṇas (*Brāhmaṇapīṭhīkā*); from the *Brāhmaṇapīṭhīkā*, the *Viṭa* moves on to *nagararathyā*, the principal road of the city. Arrival at *nagararathyā* becomes an occasion for dwelling on the great beauty of the city which is described as a *Sārvabhauma-nagara*, 'the sovereign city', or, alternatively, 'the city of the sovereign' (*Jambudvīpa-tilaka-bhūtasya, sarvaguṇāviṣkṛtavibhūteḥ*

sārvabhauma-nagarasya). Here again is a collage of images which seems to make *nagararathyā*, in the eyes of the author of the text, the nucleus of the city. *Nagararathyā*, moreover, leads on to other segments of the city, which too are loci of significant activities; the *Viṭa* moves on to the area of shops:

> . . . here I have reached the market place of the capital of the universal monarch, where shops are crowded with multitude of men coming to buy and sell beautiful commodities which are the cream of many lands and seas (*anekadeśa-sthala-jalajasāraphalgupaṇya-krayavikrayopasthita-strīpuruṣa-samvādhāntarāpaṇāṃ sārvabhauma-nagarasya vipaṇim-anuprāptaḥ*).

The marketplace, noisy with the din of its crowds, is not, however, simply a place for buying and selling:

> from the smithy a nasal sound issues, bell-metal articles put on the lathe make sound like the wailing of the ospreys, and the (serrated) cutters being pressed against the turning conch-shells, produce a sound like the (hard) breathing of a horse galloping fast. People from all regions make here their sales and purchases . . .
>
> . . . flowers laughing, as it were, with their beauty are being sold; cups are passing round and being sipped in the drinking booths, and urban birds (of prey) are making swoops on the butchers shops furnished with cutting weapons, while the buyers holding bundles of grass in hand, are looking at them with anxious eyes . . .
>
> . . . the people rubbing shoulder with one another and haggling over various articles and making purchases, are proceeding like soldiers in their files. Gamblers after earning their *māṣakas* are on the way to the courtesans; they are attended by servants carrying flowers along with cooked meat, cakes and wine.

The destination of the *Viṭa* too is the courtesans' quarter (*veśamārga*): 'I shall now leave the market place which is impassable due to a great crowd (*mahājana-sammarda-durgamaṃ vipaṇimārgaṃ*), and after leaving on the left the drinking booth, going through the flower range, and on reaching the Pūrṇabhadra crossing, I shall be on the way to the courtesans' quarter, by the Makara road.' And all the *Bhāṇas—Pādatāḍitaka* among them in particular—as well as such texts as Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭikam*[26] do not fail to underscore what a coveted part of the city the *veśamārga* was, both in terms of its spatial attractions and as a source of pleasure for even the most prudish individuals of the city.

The *Viṭa's Sārvabhauma-nagara*, in the heterogeneity of its segments of space as also of its peoples and their activities, is very much like the

city of Puhār. Apart from looking for city traits as defined by literary or moral conventions, one can look for other common traits which appeared to our early authors to mark a city out from other spaces or even one city from another city. Kusumapura of *Ubhayābhisārikā* or *Sārvabhauma-nagara* of *Pādatāḍitaka* are not cities defined either in terms of the centrality of the royal presence or in terms of a delimited space corresponding to a moral order. Like Puhār, they too represent heterogeneity, and heterogeneity with a clearly recognizable locus—the city—implies convergence on a very significant scale.

The City as a Point of Convergence

Earlier, they had put out
The incense made out of the white resin
From the *western* hills and the black agar
From the *eastern*. With the paste of sandalwood found
In the *southern* mountains, they had anointed
Themselves by rubbing it on the round, flat stone
Of unusual luster found in the *northern* mountains. [emphasis added][27]

This excerpt from the *Silappadikāram* is a part of the details which are used for describing the attractions of the residence of Mātavī, the dancing girl with whom Kovalan had fallen in love after her dance debut. Even a single residence in the city, in this description, is a point where different directions—west, east, south, north—converge. The idea that different directions meet in the city, making it a node in various senses, is again one which is not restricted to any literary convention. In this sense, all cities are open; the accent is on the presence of various elements—goods, styles, people—in a city. There is hardly any reference ever to any movement away from the city, unless it is in some way a remarkable exit—Buddha going out in search of enlightenment, Rāma on exile, or Kovalan in search of another city. To turn, briefly, to the *Silappadikāram* once again:

. . . traders from distant
Lands, come for goods carried
By ships . . .[28]

The city was indeed a point of convergence, of what was local and what came from different distances, and this is what all cities are shown to have in common. Note, for example, the following description, again in the *Silappadikāram*, of Madurai, the city of the great Pāṇḍyas; the description is of the marketplace, of the convergence of merchandise.[29]

In the market-place were sold carriages, two-wheeled carts,
Ornamented chariots, coats of mail.
For the entire body, fine goods
Inlaid with gems, leather gloves,
Useful medicines, curved bludgeons,
White yaktail fans, boar-faced shields,
Leather shields, buckles with a picture
Of the forest on them, pikestaff studded
With pearls, workers in copper and bronze,
Ropemakers, makers of garlands, saws
And other tools, workers in ivory, incense,
Sandalwood, and wreaths of flowers. The envy
Of kings, they were spread out in rich profusion.
In the wealthy neighbourhoods, unmolested by enemies,
Were shops glittering with diamonds without faults, . . .

Emeralds of brilliant green, free of dark spots,
Lines, and curves; rubies called the red lotus,
Sapphire, pearl, and flawless crystal;
The pusparaga stones covered in gold
And resembling a cat's eye; the pure sardonyx,
The color of honey and sunlight; the onyx
Like clear darkness; two-colored opals;
The fine, lucky gems that came from the same mines
And had the colors of sunset. White and pink pearls,
Pearls of the finest quality that sparkled
Without any fault, caused by wind, sand,
Stone, or water, lay in heaps,
As also branches of red coral without holes,
Not bent with stones in them or twisted.
Kovalan passed through the renowned goldsmiths' street
Flying tiny pennants to help dealers
Identify the four kinds of gold:
Natural gold, gold the color
Of parrots' wings, atakam, and Campunatam.
In the cloth merchants' street, he picked
His way through bales piled high,
Each containing a hundred lengths,
Woven of cotton, hair, or silk.
In the grain merchants' street, traders
Wandered about everywhere with balances,
Measures and bushels. There were bags of grain
And black pepper in all seasons.

Though more brief, the description of the city of Sākala, far removed from Madurai, as available in the *Milinda Pañha*, points to the presence of the same traits:

> There was a city called Sākala, a centre of all kinds of merchandise (*nānā-puṭa-bhedana*) for the Yavanas . . . the bazaar shops were filled inside with innumerable varieties of well-displayed goods . . . It had diverse and varied shops for cloths: Benares muslin, Koṭumbara stuffs and so on. It was sweet-smelling with the great variety of shops for flowers and perfumes, well and tastefully displayed. It was filled with an abundance of alluring jewels. Its shops, well-displayed and facing (all) directions, were frequented by crowds of elegant merchants. Full of *Kāhāpanas*, silver, bronze and stone-ware, it was the abode of shining treasure. The warehouses were full of an abundance of riches and corn and wealth; there were many foods and drinks, a great variety of solid and soft foods, sweets, beverages and savouries, as in Uttara Kuru.[30]

Unlike the author of the normative *Arthaśāstra*, the authors of the texts cited above, when they dwell on the city, tend to view it essentially in terms of its points of convergence: the merchandise, the crowd, the movement, the heterogeneity. Convergence made the city a microcosm of the human universe; it was therefore not simply a node for the convergence of goods; it was a universe of men who, whatever the localities of their origin, came together within the locus of the city. Standing on the *nagararathyā*, the principal road of the *Sārvabhauma-nagara*, the *Viṭa* of *Pādatāḍitaka* feels wonderstruck at what the city is composed of:

> By the coming here of kings by hundreds from hills, from islands and from seacoasts, and their settling down at different parts of the city, the people learn here, as it were, in the same place the strange and manifold story of the creation of Brahmā, which to them was unknown before.
>
> The city is full of pleasure by the assembling here of the Śakas, Yavanas, Tuṣāras, Pārasīkas, Kirātas, Kaliṅgas, Vaṅgas, Magadhas, Aṅgas, Mahiṣakas, Colas, Pāṇḍyas and Keralas.[31]

Individual characters in the city arrive from different places; *Pādatāḍitaka's* characters—prince, physician, poet, prostitute, vagabond and many more—are represented to have arrived from Daśapura, Bāhlīka, Dakṣiṇāpatha, Rohitaka, Koṅkana, Kāśī—widely distant points, but meeting within the space of the *Sārvabhauma-nagara*. Even if in the actual cities outsiders may have been unwelcome through their gates and moats, to authors of texts, the ideal city space was one which was open

and which could accommodate even a stranger. Perhaps even the ambivalence of the *Silppadikāram* with reference to Madurai brings the ideal out. Kovalan and his wife Kannagi, strangers to Madurai, crossed the river on a raft with the ascetic Kāvunti, in order to reach Madurai; they went round the moat enclosed by a protective forest:

> . . . The wide banners,
> Seized in war from his foes, flew aloft
> On the ramparts of the Pantiyan, and appeared to stop
> Them with a show of hands, warning: 'Don't enter'.[32]

And yet, when earlier Kovalan had enquired from his place of refuge on the outskirts of the city, how far Madurai was from there, the response had measured the distance by the fact that 'the south wind from Madurai blows here', and had assured Kovalan: 'Therefore, that ancient, prosperous city isn't very far from here. Even if you go alone, no one will stop you.'[33] And finally, when Kovalan did enter the city, it was through a tunnel made for herds of elephants—an unnoticed, inglorious, stealthy entry of a pitiable individual.

This element of ambivalence about the city—whether it should keep outsiders at bay or whether it allows, at least as an ideal of its chroniclers, a free, spontaneous coming together of heterogeneous elements—points further to the possibility of looking at the city from many perspectives. A city could have meanings which would not apply to other spaces; it could also mean different things to different people: it could even be felt differently, heard differently. The meanings of the city may be approached by trying to catch these meanings of difference.

Meanings of the City

As a unit of settlement, as a place to live in, a city is of course constantly recognized as different. It is indeed curious that literature offers us graphic descriptions of the forest and of the city, but not of the village. References to the village in literature are incidental, not deliberate; representations of the city are a requirement, if one follows the maxims laid down for the composition of a *mahākāvya*. Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* lists descriptions of the cities, as those of seas, mountains, etc., as essential ingredients of a *mahākāvya*; Rudraṭa's *Kāvyālaṃkāra* too prescribes that 'in the case of the invented (*utpadya*) *mahākāvya* (not based on history) one should begin with the description of a beautiful city, followed by praise of the hero who dwells there'.[34] However, the city is a good dwelling place not for the royal hero alone. The *Nāgaraka-vṛtta* of Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*[35] opens with a prescription about where young

persons of all varṇas, entering the life of a householder after the completion of studies, should reside; the text lists the places in the following order: *Nagare Pattane Kharvaṭe mahati vā sajjanāśraye sthānam*. There may be different good places to live in, but the list starts with *nagara*, the city.

Nagara, in one kind of perception then, is the ideal place to live in. However, it is not only the physical attributes of the city which make it different; the *Viṭa* of the *Bhāṇa Ubhayābhisārikā*, struck by the 'supreme beauty' of the city of Kusumapura, proceeds to describe its various charms but stops with the remark: 'Enough of details.' For the *Viṭa*, only the various physical components do not make a city; a city is what its inhabitants make of it:

> Due to the people's lack of any fear, their constant taking part in festivals with happy faces, their graceful wearing of jewels, and their gorgeous decorations of the body with garlands, scents and fine clothes, their interest in various diverting sports and for their other equally well-known qualities, the earth with Pāṭaliputra as her *tilaka* appears, as it were, like heaven . . .[36]

Another statement, in another *Bhāṇa Dhūrta-Viṭa-Saṃvāda*, echoes the essential sentiment of the author of *Ubhayābhisārikā*:

> It is in the fitness of things that the city of Kusumapura, unlike the other cities, enjoys in the world an unexceptionable reputation. Many are the high buildings in it. From its very dense population as well as its heaps of merchandise, people are astonished to mark its special opulence. But what are there to be astonished at? There are other wealthy cities too. But we shall [now] speak about some of its uncommon features. It has been said: Here donors are plentiful; arts are prized; woman's company can be enjoyed through polished manners; the rich are neither conceited nor jealous [of one another]; men are not without learning, they esteem highly one another's merits and are grateful [to their benefactors]. [In short] even Gods can find happiness in this city after quitting heaven.[37]

The city of Kusumapura too represents an order—not necessarily the kind of moral order which Ayodhyā is seen to embody—which makes the quality of living there different from living elsewhere. The difference may be expressed in material terms; it may be expressed in terms of access to opportunities not available elsewhere or in terms of particular values characterizing it—it is the repertoire of these, which constitutes the difference in relation to other places, which never fails to be underlined. The difference may be expressed, as in Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitram*, by referring to the better quality of service available in a *pattana* as compared to what may be expected in a village: *Pattane vidyamāne' pi*

grāme ratnaparīkṣā;[38] this emphatically pronounces upon the foolishness of getting gems tested in a village when the *pattana* or the commercial city exists, the expression leaving one in no doubt about the unquestionable superiority of service available in a city. The superiority may be expressed in another way, in the particular style of the sly *Viṭa* in *Dhūrta-Viṭa-Saṃvāda*:

> Living in a village, calling oneself a *śrotriya*,
> dependence on another, miserliness, and a woman
> with naivete are among the causes which
> make an end of one's amorous passion.[39]

Abundance of wealth and goods, imposing residences, heterogeneity, quality of service—these are all traits which one may expect to find present in the city and which make the quality of life in it different. But the city is also seen as providing opportunities for the cultivation of quality without taking quality for granted. The *nāgaraka*, the city-dweller of the *Kāmasūtra*, is enjoined to cultivate a way of life which is worthy of emulation; in doing so, he has access to institutions like the *goṣṭhī*, which provide ways of refining one's way of life. *Goṣṭhī* provides access to community, and subtle problems of culture, such as problems of *kāvya* and *kalā*, can be discussed and resolved in the salon-like gatherings of the *goṣṭhī*.[40] Perhaps the accomplishments which dwellers in the city can attain to perfection through careful cultivation may be best illustrated by reference to the first public performance by Mātavī, the courtesan's daughter of Puhār in the *Silappadikāram*. Mātavī's tutor 'knew well the rules of folk and classical styles'; the skills of the tutor, of the drummer, of the flautist, of the lute player combined to make Mātavī's performance delectable: '. . . her skill fused the five-beat mode of the folk and classical styles into one style. A golden vine it was that danced, for her performance showed she knew well the text on dancing.' The quality of this performance was such that:

> The gold-bangled Mātavī of Pumpuhār caused
> Her fame to spread over the earth. On the stage
> She showed by word of mouth her talent
> Concerning numbers, letters, the five types
> Of literary Tamil, the four melodic patterns,
> And the eleven kinds of dance that followed them.[41]

Mātavī was superb, but she was not unique. What she accomplished in perfection was similar to what was expected in a city like Kusumapura

or Pāṭaliputra. Says the *Ubhayābhisārikā*, referring to a courtesan girl of that city:

> For all the accessories of dance, such as mastery of four kinds of *abhinaya*, twenty-two kinds of hand gesture, five kinds of hand movement, eighteen kinds of eye, six postures, two foot movements, eight *rasas* (sentiments), three tempos for songs—and playing of instruments, have been embellished in relation to you.[42]

Accomplishments of courtesan girls, as the style of life of a *nāgaraka*, illustrate a device used in the texts to make the point with emphasis that the quality of life in the city was indeed different from what it was elsewhere. At the same time, the image of opposition between the country and the city, or of the existence of a permanent tension, perhaps stretches the literary evidence a little too liberally.[43] Rustic existence was decidedly inferior, but when the *Kāmasūtra* refers to the style of speech to be adopted in the *goṣṭhī*, it is a kind of compromise which is advocated, perhaps keeping in view heterogeneity in the composition of the *goṣṭhī*: 'There should not be excess of Sanskrit; there should not be excess of *deśabhāṣā* (country-language); conversation conducted in this style will gain appreciation among people.'[44]

What is desired is that the nuances of city life, the life as lived by a *nāgaraka*, become a model:

> The resident of the village should narrate the style of the *nāgaraka*, the city-dweller, among those who are born like him (the villager) and who are curious and discriminating; he should encourage them, generate respect [among them about this style of living] and make them imitate [this style]; should introduce *goṣṭhīs* [assemblies]; together [with others], he should entertain them and put them under obligation by extending help to them in [their] activities. This is *nāgaraka-vṛtta*.[45]

The accent, in the communication of *nāgaraka-vṛtta*, is not on imitation, but on the introduction of institutions through which community norms of the city are to expand to the village. City life is thus not really presented as a downright condemnation of living in a village; what is desired is that village life should strive towards the level of life in the city. At the same time, however, there is evidence of undisguised apprehension about the city in certain quarters, notwithstanding the way in which the majority of texts represent the city. The feeling of apprehension is not simply because, as the *Harivaṃśa* puts it, cities are 'where you have to buy your wood and vegetables';[46] it goes much deeper, to be present almost as a dogma in the *Dharmasūtras*. Despite the significant presence of the

Brāhmaṇas in the city and the fact that Veda recitations represent in literary texts a prominent strain in the cacophony of city sounds,[47] the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* seems to go by the authority of those 'some' who declare that the recitation of the Veda is always forbidden in a town.[48] The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* too enjoins that the study of the Veda should be avoided in a *nigama* (market-town); for it, the proper behaviour for a *snātaka*, that is, a pious householder who has completed his studies as a *brahmacārin*, is to avoid entering the towns frequently.[49] Baudhāyana, in his *Dharmasūtra* 'makes this attitude very clear by declaring that nobody living in the city, with his body covered with the dust of the city and his eyes and mouth filled with it, can attain salvation even if he leads an austere life'.[50] The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* does not exactly specify a village in contrast to the *Kāmasūtra's nagara*, as an ideal place to live in, but nevertheless it is the ritual and similar requirements of a *snātaka* which determine the traits of an ideal dwelling place:

> He should seek to dwell in a place where firewood, water, fodder, Kuśa grass (material for making) garlands, and roads exist in abundance, which is chiefly inhabited by Āryans, which is rich in industrious (men), and which is governed by a righteous ruler.[51]

The apprehension about the city is thus articulated, almost in a combined voice, by the writers of the *sūtras* on dharma;[52] it was their apprehension that dharma would be in jeopardy in the city. And it indeed appears that although dharma was not exactly in jeopardy, the ethos of the city encouraged questioning and even ridiculing established norms and symbols.

In this context let me refer to the central problem of the play *Pādatāḍitaka*, which concerns 'one who has been kicked'. Viṣṇunāga who calls himself an Ārya and claims knowledge of grammar and dialectics has been kicked on his head by a courtesan (the text's proponent jocularly compares the lady's kick with royal consecration—*abhiṣeka*);[53] for expiation, he seeks advice from the Brāhmaṇas, in the Brāhmaṇa quarter of the city:

> Being thus addressed, the Brahmins betrayed their tendency to laughter by the movement of their cheek, looked at each other and spoke after thinking for a while: 'O good fellow, we saw through the sacred writings of wise men like Manu, Yama, Vasiṣṭha, Gautama, Bhāradvāja, Śaṅkha, Likhita, Āpastamba, Hārīta, Pracetas, Devala, Vṛddha-Gārgya etc. and did never come across any rules of expiation for a great sin like this.'[54]

All existential problems are expected to be resolved by the *Dharmaśāstras* which govern the lives of men by making them adhere to their respective fixed stations; the play *Pādatāḍitaka* invents a problem arising out of city living which is unresolvable, even after it is referred to a multitude of *Dharmaśāstra* authorities. The problem will be resolved in its own way by the assembly of the *Viṭas*, which, being a city institution, can also do away with professional and other boundaries and bring heterogeneous elements together:

> Honourable Bhānu who roams at will; the hairy Gupta; the royal officer Viṣṇudāsa; Āryarakṣita of Śivi's clan; Rudravarmā of Daśapura; Skandasvāmī of Avantī; the physician Hariścandra; Ābhīra prince Mayūradatta; the drummer Sthānumitra; the musician Senaka; Anantakaṇṭha, the keeper of presents (of the king); the hillman Pramatha; Indravarma, the ruler of Aparānta; prince (Bhaṭṭi) Makhavarmā of Ānandapura; Jayanandaka of Surāṣṭra and Dayitaviṣṇu of the Mudgala clan. These, as far as possible, are to be brought together.[55]

What cannot be resolved by the *Dharmaśāstras* is to be resolved by this community of men whose coming together can be seen as transcending the social limits laid down for every individual by the *Dharmaśāstras*—an act which violates ideal behaviour. In fact, what is considered ideal behaviour can be ridiculed in the assembly of such men in the city:

> May he who will speak here what is improper never win anything in gambling, always obey meekly his parents' words, drink milk and the sweets and be the husband of a married wife.[56]

Conforming to what is proper in the assessment of the *Viṭas* would then yield rewards which would be the opposite of what *Dharmaśāstra*-ordained correct behaviour would ensure.

The city could be, or at least is represented as, a venue of doubts, of criticism, even of dissent and rebellion against an established order. In the Sanskrit play *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, it is not only that the thief Śarbilaka comes out with ingeniously irreverent interpretations of the sacred thread (*yajñopavītam*) of a Brāhmaṇa;[57] it is in Ujjayinī, the locus of the play, that a political revolution takes place, ending in the overthrow and killing of a tyrant and bringing in an era of just rule.[58]

Inhabited by many, and sometimes even giving the feel of a human jungle (*puruṣa-kāntāra*)[59] the city thus could not but evoke different perceptions; if there was the perception of a Brāhmaṇa, there could be the perception also of the *Viṭa* to whom becoming a *śrotriya*, that is, a Brāhmaṇa devoted to learning and scholarship, was a last act of despair.[60] The

various meanings of the city derived from but also transcended its physical attributes; to those who wrote about it, the city was ultimately what it was viewed as.

Epilogue

Even literary images of the city have a historical life. The results of archaeological research tell us that the early city emerged around the fifth-fourth centuries BC and that there was a geographical spread of the city, after its initial concentration in the region of the Ganga basin.[61] The early city is believed to have declined after reaching a stage of maturation between the first and third centuries AD.[62] The chronology of the texts used by us would suggest that the literary images of the city and normative prescriptions about it[63] are drawn from the empirical reality of the early historical city, but it does not need to be pointed out that literature can hardly be expected to provide description with cartographic precision.

The views that literature provides us with are, however, invaluable and help us to understand the position of the city in the early culture of India. Although there could be as many views of the city as there were viewers, literary views of cities are, in a way, aligned to contend the normative view. This view, which one may call the *rāṣṭra's* view of the city, sees the city as a special place, to be separated from other spaces and protected—a place no doubt accommodating workers, artisans, merchants, farmers and others, but only as ancillaries to the king and his *rāṣṭra*, because the city belongs to them. In another, more dominant view, which may be called a secular view, the city is not constituted by the mighty presence of the king or a central ritual centre; in this view, the city is a beehive of secular activity, of movement (although, for unfortunate officials in the city, the activity could only be movement from *devakula* to *rājakula* and from *rājakula* to *devakula*),[64] of convergence; it is a view of the city in which the main actors could be an impoverished Brāhmaṇa *sārthavāha*, his family, friend and his lady-love; a merchant's son; a courtesan girl; a gambler who turns to renunciation, and a host of other characters. To such characters, the city could be a locus of failure or a place which could represent a number of choices, and, to some at least, it would resonate with what Buddha said with reference to Kuśavatī: 'Eat, drink and be merry.'[65]

What were the images of the city which persisted in what would generally be called the post-classical or the early medieval phase of Indian history? If Pāṭaliputra, Ujjayinī, Puhār, Madurai or Takṣaśilā declined

and were now replaced largely by a new series of upstart cities and towns, in both old and new geographical loci,[66] would they have carried the same meanings as the cities of earlier times? Post-classical literature too is known to contain descriptions of cities, and the genre of *Vāstuśāstra* and allied texts which have detailed prescriptions about layouts of not only towns but villages as well, had a remarkable growth in this period.[67] How the views on the city in these texts and in literature compare with views on the early city can be gauged by recognizing the chronological disparity between different phenomena of urbanism and trying to decipher the dominant views in what may be considered a new urban phase. That, however, is another task.

Notes and References

1. A.K. Ramanujan, 'Toward an Anthology of City Images', in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Urban India: Society, Space and Image*, Monograph and Occasional Papers Series (Duke University, 1970), Monograph No. 10.
2. This spelling will be used throughout this essay.
3. For early Indian cities, as known from archaeology, the following works may be consulted: A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India* (reprinted, Delhi, 1990); R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India: c. 300–c. 1000* (Delhi, 1987); Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities* (Delhi, 1995); F.R. Allchin, ed., *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States* (Cambridge, 1995).
4. Early inscriptions refer to these two categories of space and population; see Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela, line seven; D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I (2nd edition, Calcutta, 1965), p. 215.
5. For discussions on various units of settlement, see Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India*, ch. 3; N. Wagle, *Society of the Time of the Buddha* (Bombay, 1966), ch. 2.
6. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha: Translated from the Pali of the Dīgha Nikāya*, part 3 (London, 1921), pp. 72–3.
7. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 2 (4th edition, London, 1959), p. 147.
8. Ibid., p. 92.
9. The text and translation of the *Arthaśāstra*, generally followed in this essay, are those of R.P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*, parts 1 and 2 (reprinted, Delhi, 1992).
10. The idea of the necessity of constructing border cities as fortifications is present in early Buddhist texts as well. The *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* refers to the king's border city (*rañño paccantimaṃ nagaram*)

in the following words: 'Strong in its foundations, strong in its ramparts and towers, and with only one gate; and the king might have a watchman there . . . to stop all strangers and admit only men well-known,' Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 2, p. 88; R.C. Childers, *The Mahaparinibbana-sutta of the Suttapitaka* (The Pali Text) (London, 1878), p. 9.

11. I.B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions* (translated from the Pali), pt I (London, 1964), pp. 1–3. It has been suggested that the *Milinda Pañha* is a collection, and the original, much shorter *Milinda* may have been composed between 100 BC and AD 200; Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature* (Berlin, New York, 1996), p. 85.
12. Horner, *Milinda's Questions*.
13. *Arthaśāstra*, 2.4. The analysis of the *Arthaśāstra* evidence is based entirely on this section.
14. An attempt has been made by L.N. Rangarajan to reconstruct the spatial structure of the fortified city. See *Kauṭilya: The Arthaśāstra*, edited, re-arranged, translated and introduced by L.N. Rangarajan (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 191–2. This schematic plan of the fortified city is reproduced in Allchin, ed., *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, p. 227. However, I find it difficult to accept Rangarajan's reconstruction because of the following reasons: (i) Kauṭilya's residential zone alone cannot correspond to the entire area of the fortified settlement; Kauṭilya refers to another segment as *Vāstucchidra*; (ii) in locating the different social groups in his map, Rangarajan uses only four cardinal directions, completely ignoring Kauṭilya's clear use of various segments of the cardinal directions; (iii) Rangarajan includes four *dvāras* with individual names mentioned in line nineteen separately among twelve *dvāras* of line two without any clear indication from the *Arthaśāstra*, and names four *dvāras* again without any clear hint from the text as to how the gates are to be named; (iv) Rangarajan completely ignores the fact that there is a hierarchy of space allocation in terms of distancing different segments with reference to the royal enclosure; (v) Rangarajan's *dvāras* in Figure 14 ('The City and Environs') on p. 191 are different from those in his schematic plan of the fortified city. So his two reconstructions are mutually incompatible; (vi) Rangarajan's drawings do not show that the royal enclosure could open either only to the north or to the east.
15. Ramanujan, 'Toward an Anthology of City Images'.
16. *The Cilappatikaram of Ilanko Atikal: An Epic of South India*, translated with an Introduction and Postscript, by R. Parthasarathy (New York, 1993), p. 25.
17. Ibid., pp. 46–8.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., pp. 61–2.
21. Ibid., p. 62.

22. These texts are: *Ubhayābhisārikā, Dhūrta-Viṭa-Saṃvāda, Padmaprābhṛtaka* and *Pādatāḍitaka*. For the texts and their translations I have generally followed Manomohan Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life in Nanda-Maurya India* (translation of the Caturbhāṇī together with a critical edition of the text) (Calcutta, 1975). However, Ghosh's argument that these texts be dated to the Nanda–Maurya period cannot be accepted. For an excellent discussion on the *Bhāṇas*, their dating, and edition and translation of the *Pādatāḍitaka*, see G.H. Schokker, *The Pādatāḍitaka of Śyāmilaka*, part 1 (The Hague, 1966); G.H. Schokker and P.J. Worsley: *The Pādatāḍitaka of Śyāmilaka*, part 2 (a translation with a complete word-index of the four ancient Sanskrit *Bhāṇas* by Schokker) (Dordrecht, 1976).
23. Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 5.
24. Ibid., pp. 110–18. The name of the author in Schokker, *The Pādatāḍitaka*, is Śyāmilaka.
25. The *Viṭa* 'is an educated man about town, who has squandered his money and who now lives upon his acting as an intermediary between the bon vivants and the courtesans. On account of his erudition and his familiarity with life in the quarter of the courtesans, he is able to give an interesting picture of this society', Schokker, *The Pādatāḍitaka*, part 1, Preface, pp. vii–viii.
26. *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, 4th Act, titled *Madanikā-Śarbilaka*.
27. Parthasarathy, *The Cilappatikaram*, p. 41.
28. Ibid., p. 46.
29. Ibid., pp. 147–9.
30. Horner, *Milinda's Questions*.
31. Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 115.
32. Parthasarathy, *The Cilappatikaram*, pp. 138–9.
33. Ibid., p. 136.
34. Mentioned in David Smith, *Ratnākara's Haravijaya: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Court Epic* (New Delhi, 1975), pp. 29–30.
35. *Kāmasūtra*, IV. 1.
36. Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, pp. 5–6.
37. Ibid., p. 30.
38. *Mālavikāgnimitram*, I.16.1.
39. Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 46.
40. *Kāmasūtra*, 4.34; 4.35.
41. Parthasarathy, *The Cilappatikaram*, pp. 34, 40.
42. Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, pp. 19–20.
43. In this connection, see Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India*, pp. 53–6.
44. *Kāmasūtra*, 4.51.
45. Ibid., 4.50.
46. Smith, *Ratnākara's Haravijaya*, p. 15, fn. 6.
47. It appears that in literature cacophony was considered to be one of the essential ingredients of the citi-ness of the city. I cite three passages from three

different texts, in order to stress the point that the city could not only be viewed differently from other spaces, but could be heard differently as well: (i) Buddha's reference to Kuśavatī in *Mahāparinibbāna-suttānta*: 'Both by day and by night, Ānanda, the royal city Kuśavatī resọunded with the ten cries, that is to say the noise of elephants, and the noise of horses, and the noise of chariots; the sounds of the drums, of the tabor, and of the lute; the sound of singing and the sounds of the cymbal and of the gong; and lastly, with the cry: "Eat, drink and be merry".' Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 2, p. 162. (ii) *Viṭa's* reference to *Sārvabhauma-nagara* in *Pāda-tāḍitaka*: 'How wonderful is its mingling of great noises. . .', Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 117. (iii) *Silappadikāram* with reference to Madurai:

. . . The roar
Of the morning drums, the echo
Of the pure, white conches sounded in unison
From the temple of Śiva with an eye in his forehead,
The temple of Viṣṇu with the eagle-banner,
The temple of Balarāma who brandished the plow
As a weapon, the temple of Murukan with the cock-banner,
The temple of the arhats who expound dharma,
And the palace of the victorious king.

And,

Nearer dawn, they heard,
Like distant thunder, the sound of the morning drum
Being beaten with exquisite fervour in the great temple
Of Śiva and in the famous palace of the renowned king,
Punctuated by the sounds of other instruments,
The chanting of hymns by brahmans who knew
The four Vedas, and the voices of those doing
Great penance reciting the holy names
Of gods. They heard the everyday sound
Of the tymbal, in praise of the king . . .
. . . sounded
By warrior-swordsmen, the loud trumpeting
Of war elephants seized in battle,
The screams of wild elephants captured
In forests, the neighing of horses standing
In a row, the sound of the hourglass drum
Played at dawn by singers, and other clamorous sounds,
Coming from Maturai, that excelled the roar
Of the dark sea. These sounds fell
On the ears of the travelers as if to welcome them
And end all their woes.

Parthasarathy, *The Cilappatikaram*, pp. 136–7, 140.

The cacophony, it is believed, does not disturb the harmony of the city. With reference to the city of Ujjayinī, *Bṛhat-kathā-śloka-saṃgraha* says this: '. . . where in every house, the sound of the reciting of the Vedas, of bow strings and of Vipañcis (an arched harp with nine strings, played with a plectrum) do not oppress each other, even though they sound together.'

E.P. Mathen, *Budhasvāmin's Bṛhat-kathā-śloka-saṃgraha: A Literary Study of an Ancient Indian Narrative* (Leiden, 1973), p. 6.

48. *Gautama Dharmasūtra*, 16.45; G. Bühler, *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas as Taught in the School of Āpastamba, Gautama, Vasiṣṭha and Baudhāyana*, part I: *Āpastamba and Gautama*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1879).
49. *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, 1.3.9.4. and 1.11.32.21; Bühler, *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas*.
50. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India*, p. 53.
51. *Gautama Dharmasūtra*, 9.65; Bühler, *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas*.
52. One may note that the Brāhmaṇical attitude was not necessarily that of the mendicants, who also, perhaps, did not wish to live in the city proper. Buddha, when he visited a city, lived on its outskirts, note, however, the wistful look that Buddha gave to Vaiśali which he visited sometime before his *Mahāparinirvāṇa*: '. . . returning from his alms-seeking he gazed at Vesāli with an elephant-look, and addressed the venerable Ānanda, and said: "This will be the last time, Ānanda, that the Tathāgata will behold Vesāli".' Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 3, p. 130.
53. Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 108.
54. Ibid., p. 110.
55. Ibid., p. 113.
56. Ibid., p. 161.
57. *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, Act 3 titled *Sandhiccheda*.
58. Ibid.
59. This is how *Sārvabhauma-nagara* is also described in the *Pādatāḍitaka*; Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, pp. 101, 143.
60. Note the declaration by the *Viṭa* in *Dhūrta-Viṭa-Saṃvāda*: 'If such words will be spoken by any other woman also, on hearing all this, I shall give up the profession of a Vita and become a peer of a *śrotriya*.' Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 54.
61. See references cited in note 3 above.
62. See R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, in particular.
63. An important study on early Indian city, which combines literary and archaeological sources is by D. Schlingloff, *Die Altindische Stadt* (Wiesbaden, 1969). I am grateful to Professor B. Kölver for explaining the contents of this publication to me.

64. The *Pādatāḍitaka* bestows ridicule on one who, being attached to high positions, has to spend his days in shuttling back and forth between the temple and the royal palace:

    Devakulād-rājakulaṃ rājakulād-yāti devakulam eva
    Iti yasya yānti divasaḥ kula-dvaye samprasaktasya.

    Ghosh, *Glimpses of Sexual Life*, p. 78.

65. See note 47.

66. See B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994), chs. 6 and 7; idem., 'Urban Centres in Early Bengal', *Pratna-Samiksha*, nos. 2 and 3, Calcutta, 1993–4, pp. 169–92.

67. See, for list and nature of *Vāstu-śāstra* texts, D.N. Shukla, *Vāstu-Śāstra*, vol. I, *Hindu Science of Architecture* (Delhi, 1995); for the contents of a text, see the translation of *Mānasāra* in P.K. Acharya, *Architecture of Mānasāra*, (translated from the original Sanskrit, Mānasāra series, vol. VI) (Delhi, 1980), pp. 93–8.

CHAPTER 7

'Autonomous Spaces' and the Authority of the State: The Contradiction and Its Resolution in Theory and Practice in Early India*

'Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear,
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold
And the strong Lance of Justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.'

King Lear, IV.6.164

It is necessary, at the beginning of this essay, to offer some justification for writing on a theme the scope of which is very much imperfectly defined both in terms of its disparate time-spans and regional foci and the diffused nature of the empirical evidence it is going to be based on. It will be seen, as the essay progresses, that we have, at least initially, chosen material from sources which cannot be considered to relate to 'Classical' India by adopting even a most flexible definition of the term 'Classical'. It is only in the second part of the essay that we have tried to situate the focus on what we would prefer to call the 'early' or 'early historical' period of Indian history.[1] Methodologically, this approach would certainly appear to be arbitrary to those among us who insist on arranging their data in a chronological order and who, justifiably, highlight regional variations. The justification that we can offer at this stage for the approach we have adopted in this essay—and in fact the rest of the essay is an elaboration of this justification—is that the essay is not concerned

*Reprinted from Bernhard Kölver, ed., *Recht, Staat und Verwaltung in Klassischen Indien* (The State, the Law, and Administration in Classical India) (München, 1997).

with the history of any particular state and the range of relations within it, but rather with posing a problem which appears to have characterized state systems in different phases of Indian history. In our view, the problem was of the form of a measure of contradiction inhering all state structures, and all state societies,[2] in order to be able to continue into existence, had resolution of this contradiction built into them. Both the contradiction and the way its resolution manifested itself through the working of the apparatus of the state can be looked for not only in practice but in early perceptions of the state as well. This search is the major concern of this essay, and since our assumption is that the contradiction is present, in some form or the other, in all pre-modern state structures, we have not felt, at least for the purpose of this essay, methodologically inhibited in drawing upon sources pertaining to different periods and different regions.

I

To elucidate the contradiction that we are trying to formulate, we shall cite empirical material we have chosen from the 'early medieval/medieval' period of Indian history and then work backward in time to the early historical period. The first piece of evidence is an epigraph 'incised on a pillar in the temple of Someśvara' at Nadol,[3] the political centre of the Nadol branch of the Cāhamānas, in the district of Pali in southeast Marwar. Dated in AD 1140–41, the inscription belongs to the time of Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Rāyapāladeva and gives certain details of the preparation of a document by representatives of a settlement called Dhālopasthāna, presumably a township identical with Dhalop, located four miles south-southwest of Nadol. The record refers to sixteen Brāhmaṇas of Dhālopa, representing its eight spatial segments or wards; the spatial distribution of the Brāhmaṇas can be shown in the following chart:

Brāhmaṇas	*Spatial Segment of Dhālopa*
1. Vīrigu	
2. Prabhākara	Merivāḍā[4]
3. Āsadeū	
4. Mahaḍu	Ḍīpavāḍā
5. Deu	
6. Ghāhaḍi	Duṃḍaṇavāsu
7. Muhaṃkaru	
8. Divākaru	Bhāṃguravāḍau

9. Devāïcu	
10. Dhāraü	Pīpalavāḍā
11. Nārāyaṇa	
12. Mahāica	Aṃbilavāḍā
13. Āsigu	
14. Āsapālu	Ḳhaïkhannalāvāḍā
15. Devaṃgu	
16. Āmbigu	Bhuṃḍavāḍā

Mediated by Devāica (*madhyaka-Devāica-sahitaḥ*) and headed by the sixteen Brāhmaṇas, the entire settlement of Dhālopa 'tendered a document written [i.e. signed] with their own hands' (*samasta-loko . . . svahastā-kṣarapatraṃ prayacchati*). The *akṣarapatram* stipulated that they would find out, in accordance with the custom of the country, 'by means of *caukaḍikā* system[5] . . . whatever is lost by, or snatched away from, the *bhaṭa*,[6] *bhaṭṭaputra*[7], *dauvārika*,[8] *kārpaṭika*,[9] *vaṇijjārakas*,[10] and others on their way.[11] If it was, however, lost at their own place, i.e., at any particular ward at Dhālopa, the responsible individuals thereof already named were to find it out in person.' Resources such as money, weapons and watchmen could be provided by rulers like Rāyapāla, and a declaration was also made to the effect that 'if any Brāhmaṇa amongst them who being asked by chiefs (*rāṇaka*) to find out some lost property, refused to do so, asked for means of subsistence or fled away, or, if apprehended, had recourse to *kāyavrata* or self-immolation, he would die like a cur, donkey or *caṇḍāla*, and the chiefs (*rāṇaka*), such as Rāyapāla, and others, would in no wise be open to blame'. The record contains a long list of witnesses to the document, mostly Brāhmaṇas attached to temples of Śaivite affiliation, and not all necessarily located at Dhālopa or even at Nadol. In fact, the witnesses included, apart from Brāhmāṇas, 'the whole class of bankers (*mahājana*) belonging to Aṇahillapura' or Anhilwara, the capital of the Caulukyas, and a group of merchants, suggested by the term *śreṣṭhī* prefixed to the name of one of them.

The record makes several references to the local Cāhamāna ruler Rāyapāladeva and to the resources he was expected to provide to the community at Dhālopa for the implementation of the contents of the documents, but it is the community of Dhālopa which is overwhelmingly present and visible in the record. Although Nadol, the political centre of the local Cāhamāna state, was only four miles away, local security was the concern of the community of Dhālopa (*Śrī Dhālopīyalokasya*

sammatena), and, further, it ends with the expression *Samasta-Śrī Dhālopīyalokasya mate*.

The second piece of evidence, which is in many ways dissimilar to the one from Rajasthan, dates to the second half of the twelfth century (AD 1173), belongs to the reign of Jayaccandra of the Gāhaḍavāla dynasty and is available also in the form of an epigraph discovered in eastern Uttar Pradesh[12]—a region with which the Gāhaḍavālas, with their major political centres in Vārāṇasī and Kānyakubja, were closely associated.[13] The epigraph, although it too begins with a reference to the rule of Jayaccandra, is essentially a community document which originated in the village (*grāma*) of Lāhaḍapura and was drafted by the Brāhmaṇa residents of the village. The term *sthiti* occurring in the record was taken to correspond to *sthiti-patraka* of Smṛti literature by D.C. Sircar. Sircar translated the term as a 'fixed decision, ordinance or a decree'. This *sthiti* was *racita* or composed by Brāhmaṇas described in the record as *samvit-samāgata*,[14] that is, by those who had come to a 'mutual agreement or contract'; the *sthiti* is thus defined as a 'document recording the fixed decision of a corporate body'. The 'decree' was the community's response to depredations by 'anti-social elements', promulgated in order to protect the local people who were suffering from their depredations. These depredations are specified as *luṇṭhanam* (plundering) and *mahiṣyādiveṣṭanam* (seizure of cattle). The decision stipulated that the person found guilty of such crimes should be killed at once and his property confiscated (*tasya cakṣurvadhaḥ kāryaḥ*[15] *sarvasvaharaṇaṃ tathā*), his abettor should be expelled and his house demolished (*bhaṃktvā gṛhaṃ niṣkālya*) and the instigator of the crime (*vimantri*) was to be treated like a dog, an ass and a Caṇḍāla (*vārayaṃstulyaḥ sa śva-Caṇḍāla-garddabhaiḥ*). The witness to the *sthiti* was god Dvādaśārka, the appropriateness of invoking the deity as a witness being suggested by his appellation '*loka-locana*', that is, 'the eye of the world'.

Despite their obvious dissimilarities, the contents of the two early medieval records presented above will justifiably evoke an immediate query: if such vital areas of administration as security, policing and justice were essentially concerns of the residents of a village or a town, did then the autonomy of the village or the town community render the apparatus of the state redundant? Indeed, in the two cases cited above, whereas it is the local community which is overwhelmingly dominant, the administrative machinery of the state is, in the same measure, invisible. To those familiar with early medieval epigraphy, evidence of this kind is hardly unique; on the contrary, it is plentiful, particularly in early

medieval south India, even in the contexts of state structures which are often considered to have been characterized by organizational strength and cohesion. The evidence of the visibility of what we have termed 'autonomous spaces' is obviously in a large measure antithetical to the apparatus of the state and can be unsettling to a student of even early political history. How unsettling such evidence can be is illustrated by the way D.C. Sircar reacted to the evidence of the Lāhaḍapura record: 'The question is now as to the capacity in which the Brāhmaṇas of Lāhaḍapura issued the decree.'[16] In the absence of any reference to royal approval in the record, Sircar considered the possibility of the Brāhmaṇas of Lāhaḍapura having been specially empowered by the Gāhaḍavāla king 'to act in the manner described in the inscription'; an alternative supposition of Sircar was that 'there prevailed a sort of anarchy resulting from maladministration in the region in question and the leaders of the local population had to make their own arrangements for the suppression of anti-social elements'. Although Sircar did not really subscribe to either alternative and came to consider *dharmaśāstric* injunctions as a solution to the problem posed by the record, his analysis of the evidence remained essentially characterized by ambivalence all through. While pointing out that most ancient lawgivers absolved the Brāhmaṇas from capital punishment, Sircar nevertheless felt it necessary to suggest that the Brāhmaṇas of Lāhaḍapura 'did not find the prescriptions suitable for the preservation of law and order in their area under prevailing conditions'. Elsewhere too, Sircar's comments make it abundantly clear that he found it difficult to make the contents of the record conform to *dharmaśāstric* norms.

In any case, the evidence bearing upon the ways in which contingent situations were met by locally organized social groups presents only one facet of the problem being posed in this essay. Evidence of this kind needs to be juxtaposed with evidence of another kind for designing the problem in the round, and we now turn to another epigraphic record, again not entirely unique in its contents, of the second half of the fourteenth century (AD) from the Deccan. Engraved on a stone at Bhandara *basaḍi* at Sravana Belgola, the most celebrated Jaina centre in the Deccan, the record is concerned with a major dispute and its resolution between the Vaiṣṇavas and the Jainas.[17] A relevant part of the record reads: '. . . a dispute having arisen between the Jainas and the *bhaktas* (Vaiṣṇavas), the blessed people (the Jaina) of all the *nāḍus* including Āṇeyagoṇḍi, Hosapaṭṭaṇa, Penuguṇḍe and the city of Kalleha having petitioned to Bukkarāya about the injustice done by the *bhaktas*, the king,

taking the hand of the Jainas and placing it in the hand of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas of the eighteen *nāḍus*, including all the *ācāryas* of the place, the chief of which are Kovil Tirumale, Perumāl Kovil, and Tirunārāyaṇapura; all the *samayis*; all the *sātvikas; moshṭikas*; those of the holy service, óf the holy feet and of the (holy) water, the forty-eight people; the *sāvanta-bovas*; and the Tirukula and Jāṃbavakula—and declaring (at the same time) that there was no difference between the Vaiṣṇava *darśana* (or faith) and the Jaina *darśana*, (decreed) . . .'

The royal presence in this record, in contrast to the king's near-invisibility in the records cited earlier, did not simply mean the king acting as a distant mediator in a religious dispute. The decree which in this case emanated from the king did attempt to bring about an amicable solution between the two religious communities by declaring that 'if loss or advancement should be caused to the Jaina *darśana* through the *bhaktas*, the Vaishṇavas will kindly deem it as loss or advancement caused (to their own *darśana*) . . . For as long as the sun and the moon endure, the Vaishṇava creed will continue to protect the Jaina *darśana*. The Vaishṇavas and the Jainas are one (body); they must not be viewed as different.' However, the decree went much beyond these pronouncements. First, it stipulated that the Jaina *darśana* would be, as before, entitled to the five great musical instruments and the *kalaśa* or the vase—obviously implying restoration of secular symbols of status to the Jaina community, the loss of which must have been one reason for their dispute with the community of the Vaiṣṇavas. Second, although the arrangement appears somewhat incongruous, the decree stipulated the levy of cash for the appointment of a number of guards and for repair to dilapidated Jinālayas. Transgression of the arrangements stipulated in the record by any individual would make him 'a traitor to the king, a traitor to the *saṃgha* and the *samudāya*'. Third, the individual *Basuvi-seṭṭi* who initiated the petition to the king Bukkarāya in order that the dispute be resolved was given by both the *samayas* or communities, in unison, 'the dignity of *Saṃghanāyaka*'. It may be argued that the context of the Sravana Belgola record, being purely religious, does not merit comparison with the situations reflected in the Nadol and Lāhaḍapura inscriptions or that the scale of involvement of local social groups in the two sets of records was different. The argument would, in our opinion, not be totally relevant; both sets of records relate to what was perceived as the domain of *vyavahāra*, one of the ways in which the state was expected to regulate, or rather keep, social relations in proper order. The significant difference between the two sets of evidence, in our view, is that in one set the space of authority is overwhelmingly

local and appears autonomous; in the other, the presence of the apex authority, although it is not articulated through the use of the administrative machinery of the state, is very much visible in the resolution of a situation of conflict. The contradiction, then, consisted in the presence of autonomous spaces within the structure of a state, but that it was not the only kind of contradiction in existence will be apparent as we proceed further.

II

'The relation between a kingdom and another community could not be clear-cut; it might be difficult to say whether the other community was inside it, or outside it, or subject to it, or independent of it.'[18]

We start this section with the above quote because, in a way, it is characteristic of the way historians generally approach early evidence bearing upon the state and the community, for the evidence, as we have seen above, does not seem to make it clear to what extent the community/communities were integrated into the state structure and to what extent they were at a 'distance' from this structure. We can now turn to considering briefly the evidence from the early historical period to demonstrate that the problem of the demarcation of spaces of authority was present not only in the context of early medieval/medieval India, it was present in early historical India as well. In other words, any attempt to understand early Indian state systems in theory and in practice has to grapple with the existence of different spaces of authority and with the problem of their relationship within a structure.

To students of the history of the Mauryan state, the fact is quite familiar that it was afflicted by severe famines, and the evidence of two Mauryan period records, the Mahasthan fragmentary stone plaque inscription from Bogra district of Bangladesh[19] and that of the Sohgaura bronze plaque inscription from Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh,[20] is often cited as illustrative of the direct involvement of the Mauryan state and its *mahāmātra* officials in famine relief measures. The inscriptions indeed refer to the officials, to the *koṣṭhāgāra* or to the store-house and to provisions made both in kind and cash. At the same time, one must be aware of the evidence available, for example in the Jātakas, that famine relief could also be the concern of the local authority.[21] It is really unnecessary to keep on adding to examples of this kind; concrete cases which could come under the purview of either the apex authority or a cohesive social group pertained not only to *vyavahāra* but to other areas as well. The point can perhaps be effectively made, without digressing into a detailed

discussion on the nature of the Mauryan state, by stating that while the Mauryan state had a number of administrative centres in its core regions and different categories of officials,[22] references to them in Aśokan edicts were only incidental whereas references to *dhaṃma* were regular and deliberate. It was *dhaṃma* which encompassed different ethnic communities of his empire: the Yavanas, Kambojas, Bhojas, Raṭhikas, Āndhras, Pulindas, Nābhakas, Nābhapaṃthis in addition to numerous other communities. Aśoka did mention his own *prabhāva* or prowess, making pointed reference to the situation of compulsion which provoked him;[23] he also stood for *viyohāla-samatā* or equity in justice.[24] But Aśoka's repeated claims that it was *dhaṃma* which brought about homogeneity in social behaviour among communities in his empire to the extent to which it was absent for 'many hundreds of years in the past' constitute an admission of the existence of multiplicity of patterns in social behaviour. Obviously, Aśoka's *dhamma* was different from what Robert Lingat calls '*dharma's* domain'[25] in the same manner in which his *dhamma-vijaya* was different from *dharma-vijaya* of the Brāhmaṇical texts. His *dhamma* and *dhamma-vijaya* were unifiers, whereas dharma and *dharma-vijaya* of Brāhmaṇical texts could at best stand for accommodation.[26] In trying to understand the presence of autonomous spaces of authority within the structure of a state it is therefore necessary to understand how sources of authority were perceived and how they were sought to be related to the authority of the state. It has been observed[27]: '. . . despite definite similarity of *arthaśāstra* literature with *dharmaśāstras*, the early schools of political thought in ancient India had been largely independent of the Brāhmaṇa "codes of law". Moreover, a large number of "state" and "political plots"[28] were borrowed by the authors of *dharmaśāstras* from *arthaśāstra* literature. Gradually, however, the orthodox Brāhmaṇas, especially in the Gupta and the subsequent epochs, tried to represent the ancient Indian political thought, closely connected with rationalistic conceptions, as an integral part of the Brāhmaṇa tradition.' We are not sure whether one can really disentangle the prehistory of non-orthodox Brāhmaṇical, rationalistic *Arthaśāstra* tradition from orthodox Brāhmaṇical *Dharmaśāstra* tradition, but it would appear that all through the pre-Gupta early historical phase, the notion of dharma, in whatever form, remained embedded in the theory of the state. Briefly stated, dharma correlated with distinct segments in society, and the segments could be of many forms or could be differently constituted. Thus, there could be *grāmadharma, śreṇīdharma, kuladharma, nigamadharma* and so on;[29] in other words, there could be a multiplicity of dharmas as

distinct from the homogeneous *dhamma* of Aśoka, and the relevance of the multiplicity of dharmas for the structure of the state is that like 'autonomous' political spaces, they were potential spaces of authority, since the king or the apex authority was enjoined to take cognizance of and maintain these dharmas. As early a text as the *Gautama Dharmaśūtra* recognized that 'cultivators, traders, herdsmen, money-lenders and artisans (have authority to lay down rules) for their respective classes. Having learned the (state of) affairs from those who in each case have authority (to speak, he shall give) the legal decision.'[30] The *vyavahāravidhi* or the legal procedure over which Khāravela, king of Kaliṅga in the first century BC, is reputed to have acquired expertise,[31] would have ideally involved familiarity with a multiplicity of dharmas. Even a 'rationalistic' text like the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya has a provision to the effect that the 'Records and Audit office' must have, among other things, record of 'laws, transactions, customs and fixed rules of regions, villages, castes, families and corporations'.[32] In fact, it became the standard practice of all *Dharmaśāstra* texts to refer to the multiplicity of dharmas or *ācāras* in the context of *vyavahāra*. Yājñavalkya for example characterizes *svadharma* in terms of *kula, jāti, śreṇī, gaṇa* and *janapada*.[33] He in fact goes a step further and enjoins that when a *pararāṣṭra* or another state is subjugated, even then the *ācāra, vyavahāra* and the *kulasthiti* of the subjugated state should continue in the form in which it existed under the previous king.[34] On the issue of precedence, Manu's position is suggested by the following: 'A king who knows *dharma* (sacred law) should carefully enquire into the customs of castes, of countries, of guilds and of families and settle (or enforce) the customs peculiar to each. Whatever may have been practised by the good and by the twice-born men devoted to *dharma*, that shall be established (by the king) as the law, *provided it be not opposed to the (customs) of countries, families and castes*'[35] (emphasis added). The caveats that the multiple dharmas were authoritative and binding if they were not opposed to Vedic scriptures or to the welfare of the state[36] were thus not really in keeping with the essence of what the *Dharmaśāstra* texts intended to convey.

If we agree with Robert Lingat that 'legislative power is a right attributed to a constitutionally competent authority to pronounce rules having a general application and possessing, in principle, a permanent character' and that 'law must be distinguished from an order which is a command addressed to an individual or a group of individuals',[37] then the wide range of dharmas cannot be considered to have constituted law for the state. At the same time, legislation did not emanate from the apex

authority and find expression in *vyavahāra*; the epigraphic evidence cited above as well as evidence of other kinds on the other hand shows that sources of authority and the expression of this authority were many. What, then, held the state system together and made the state society continue to exist?

Historiography, in our opinion, has not faced this question squarely so far, perhaps because it has generally endeavoured to measure the authority of the state in terms of institutions alone. Even without going into detail as to how the authority of the state has been viewed, beyond the simplistic centralization–decentralization dichotomy, in historiography, it will be in order to take note of it briefly for, as we have mentioned earlier, the problem has to be designed and understood in the round, both in terms of actual historical situations as well as in terms of how the state was perceived in the contemporary society. It would seem that among the much-maligned nationalist historians, the presence of what we have termed 'autonomous spaces' did not appear to be contradictory to the authority of the state; the state power, represented by the authority of the king, could reach 'a pitch of absolutism' in different phases. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, for example, envisaged 'the absolutist spirit' of the third century BC comparable to what one finds in Ptolemaic and other states that arose on the ruins of the Alexandrine empire.[38] Sastri, in his analysis of the 'Government of the Cola empire', similarly contrasts 'the primitive and somewhat tribal chieftaincy of the earlier time' with 'the almost Byzantine royalty of Rājarāja and his successors' and 'a numerous and powerful bureaucracy'.[39] Sastri at the same time was clearly aware that the extent to which the bureaucratic apparatus of the state functioned was that of 'controlling, supervising, and regulating an existing order, changing it, if at all, only by imperceptible steps. No government of an Indian state ever enjoyed in those days legislative power in the modern sense of the term. . . . Indian society did not commit to the care of the government anything more than the tasks of police and justice.'[40] Sastri did not find any contradiction between his notions of 'Byzantine royalty' and 'a numerous and powerful bureaucracy' and 'government by means of primary assemblies', which, in T.V. Mahalingam's terminology, represented the 'machinery of rural administration and self-governing institutions'.[41]

In terms of this perspective, to quote G.S. Dikshit,[42] 'The Central government was not supposed to be interested in the internal affairs of the *nāḍus*' [i.e. local assemblies]. However, there are at least two views which posit total opposition between state authority and 'autonomous

spaces'. To cite one example, K.R. Hall, who like other adherents of the concept of 'Segmentary State' is highly critical of the views of Nilakanta Sastri, keeps on underlining the essential opposition between the autonomy of local institutions[43] like *nāḍus* and 'the sudden expansion and contraction' of the royal polity of the Colas, and does not consider it necessary to analyse the presence of the 'local autonomy' within the Cola state system. A more diachronic approach is present in the 'feudal' view of early Indian polity, which considers the emergence of autonomous spaces as a deviation from a bureaucratic state system. In trying to highlight the contrast between the Maurya and Gupta periods, R.S. Sharma, for example, writes:[44] 'The [Gupta] period marked the sudden elevation of the village administration to a high position of authority. This was a necessary concomitant of the reduction of the bureaucratic staff. Local elements also played an important part in the administration of law and justice which seems to have been far more organised in this than in an earlier period.' Understandably, this 'feudal' view would consider it futile to look for the presence of 'autonomous spaces' in the pre-'feudal' state system of the Maurya period.[45]

III

A. '[. . .] the power of social norms in regulating conduct is often more valid in the study of ancient ideas and values than in the sociological model that stresses the direct power relationship and describes society simply in terms of coercion of some men by others.'[46]

B. 'When men had *dharma* as their sole purpose and were speakers of the truth, then there was no legal procedure, no enmity, and no selfishness. Legal procedure came into being at the time when *dharma* was lost among men. The overseer of legal procedures is the king; he has been made the rod-bearer.'[47]

The above two quotes, the first from a modern text concerned with the relationship of 'Kingship and Community in Early India' and the second from an ancient *Dharmaśāstra* text, relate to the issue raised in this essay in the following manner. 'The power of social norms in regulating conduct' would conform to the notion of dharma in the sense in which the *Dharmaśāstras* enjoin the king to maintain social order by taking cognizance of different dharmas; at the same time, the *Dharmaśāstra* text quoted above refers to the loss of dharma and goes beyond dharma by locating the origin of *vyavahāra* and its implementation through *daṇḍa* in this loss. We mentioned above that the presence of autonomous spaces

within state structures was not the only contradiction one has to reckon with; it seems that the built-in resolution of this contradiction is implicit in the way the *Dharmaśāstras* calculatedly contradict themselves. In trying to make this position a little more clear, we choose three ideas interwoven into early Indian perceptions of the state—ideas which must be familiar to all students of early Indian political thought. These ideas relate to: (a) the origin of the state,[48] (b) the elements of the state and the position of the *svāmī* in it,[49] (c) the four feet of legal procedure.

The essence of early Indian thought explaining the origin of the state may be expressed in the following way:

Dharma + *Daṇḍa*
↓
Dharma = *Daṇḍa*

It was loss of dharma which made the origin of the state necessary; at the same time *daṇḍa* which was necessary for the maintenance of social order was so important as to be equated with dharma.[50] By implication, dharma which existed within the framework of the state, which in turn arose in a situation of conflict, could not have been identical with dharma which was superseded by *vyavahāra* and *daṇḍa*.

Nārada highlights that the 'king was the overseer of legal procedure'; he was made the wielder of *daṇḍa* or force. But the texts make it abundantly clear that the *svāmī* or the master did not constitute the state; he was one among several limbs (*aṅgas*) constituting it. The concept of *aṅgas*[51] underlines that various elements of the state were interrelated; this interrelatedness is suggested also by other 'allegories' employed to describe the state. H. Scharfe has cited the evidence of an inscription of Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Amoghavarṣa (ninth century), which compared the king 'to the soul, the ministers to the mind, and the servants to the senses'; Scharfe also refers to the Jaina author Somadeva 'who compared the state with a tree, in which the king is the root, his people all the rest'.[52]

If the *svāmī* or the master alone did not constitute the state, the state was not an agglomeration of various communities either. The constituents of the state comprised *pura* and *durga* and the *janapada*, or the city (that is, residents of the city) and the country (that is, rural population) along with *amātya* (officials), treasury, army and so on. The conceptualization of the state thus made it an entity in which various communities or territorial segments did not simply exist together; the interrelated limbs of the state did not correspond to these community or territorial segments but reflected a schema in which these various segments had an ordered

existence. Since the state originated in a situation of conflict, the *svāmī* as the *Mahāsammata* or the 'Great Elect' had to be considered as 'the protector' of a social order which negated such conflict. Finally, as the state was not an agglomeration of communities, so *vyavahāra* too could not simply be an agglomeration of various dharmas. Note, for example, the following statements made in Nārada: (i) 'Local groups, guilds, assemblies, an appointed judge, and the king: these are the venues for legal proceedings. They are mentioned in ascending order of importance;' and further, (ii) 'The four feet of legal procedure are dharma, legal procedure, custom, and the king's decree; each latter one overrules the former.'[53] The same type of ordering is present in a passage, considered to be late, in the *Arthaśāstra*, which too 'speaks of four feet of lawsuit, dharma (truth or morality), *vyavahāra* (transactions regarding sale, purchase, debts, deposits, wages, etc.), *carita* (usages relating to time, place, family, guild, etc.) and *rājaśāsana* (royal edicts or orders)'.[54] There is no need to think that this is what was followed in actual practice; what is important in the schema is the presence of the notion of hierarchy which clearly places different sources of authority at different levels.

How does all this relate to the 'autonomous spaces' we referred to earlier and to the concrete examples of local authority having been exercised by such 'autonomous spaces'? By now it should be clear that we do not view 'autonomous spaces' as existing outside a state structure but inside it. As a hypothesis, if the state is viewed as a system of coordination between different 'autonomous spaces' through the mediation of an apex authority, then the 'autonomous spaces' cannot be viewed as existing in isolation from one another or as homogeneous entities. In an earlier work[55] we had attempted to show that physical spaces, even when sharply different from one another, existed in a relationship of constant interaction and change; so did various spaces of authority. In the same work we tried to show that in Bengal of the Gupta period, local bodies which would correspond to our notion of 'autonomous spaces' could function in active association with representatives of the apex authority. The local bodies were, however, not constituted by the entire local community; the community itself was differentiated, and therefore the local bodies too represented hierarchy and points of authority at local levels.[56]

In conclusion, we would like to stress that by insisting that 'autonomous spaces' existed in different periods of the history of state in India, we do not view the state as a static system. The structure of the 'autonomous spaces' could change, as indeed it did in Gupta and post-Gupta Bengal; the structure of the apex authority was obviously not identical in the

Maurya, Kuṣāṇa, Gupta and early Rajput periods. It would therefore be illogical to suppose that the relationship between the changing structures of the limbs of the state would have remained static in history.

Notes and References

1. Terminologies which relate to attempts to periodize Indian history are often found unsatisfactory and do not represent consensus. The terms being used in this essay are those generally current among Indian historians. For a recent discussion of the problem, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994), ch. 1.
2. In this particular context, the term 'state society' is being used for several reasons. One, the term 'state society' rather than simple 'state' brings into clear focus the very major distinction between two radically different types of societies, one in which the 'state' did not exist, and the second in which the emergence of the state altered patterns of relations within communities and between communities. Second, although the appearance of the state in historical India dates from about the middle of the first millennium BC, one cannot consider the history of the state in India in terms of the history of an Indian state. Actual states existed for varied spans of time, and state formation in regions without prior experience of the state was a continuing process. These trends in Indian history seem to be better expressed by using the term 'state society' rather than 'state' because 'state society' would highlight the continuity of the institution of state in India with its associated characteristics, without, however, implying the existence of the Indian state.
3. D.R. Bhandarkar, 'The Chahamanas of Marwar', in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 11 (1911–12) (reprinted Delhi, 1981), pp. 37–41.
4. Bhandarkar (ibid.) pointed out that *vāḍā, vāḍaū, vāsu* and *pāḍi* were terms which, in contemporary usage, referred to wards or localities of a town.
5. *Caukaḍikā* seems to correspond to *caukaḍiyā* or *cauthiyā*, which, according to J. Tod, was a council of members elected by the residents of a village or a town. D.C. Sircar who has cited Tod also cites inscriptional evidence on the institution of *caturjātaka* which, according to him, corresponded to a 'board of four': D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient and Medieval India* (Delhi, 1974), pp. 78ff. The Nadol inscription however mentions only the principle of *caukaḍikā*, the actual number of members being different.
6. *Bhaṭa*, according to Bhandarkar (op. cit.), would refer to *bhāṭs* or bards.
7. Bhandarkar (op. cit.) would consider *bhaṭṭaputra* to correspond to 'Bhārhoṭ, a higher class of professional panegyrists'.
8. *Dauvārikas* were doorkeepers of kings, known as *ḍūḍiḍārs* (ibid.).
9. The term *kārpaṭika* referred to pilgrims or caravans of pilgrims (ibid.).

10. *Vaṇijjāraka* refers to *vanjāris* or *vanjāras* who were itinerant groups transporting goods from one point to another. For other references to this group and their activities in this region in the early medieval period, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990), ch. 3.
11. The relevant part of the record reads: *mārge gacchamānabhaṭa-bhaṭṭaputra-dauvārika-kārpaṭika-vaṇijjārakādi-ʻsamastalokasya ca satkaṃ gatam apahṛtaṃ ca deśaćareṇa caukaḍikāpravaheṇāsmābhiḥ nirgamanīyaṃ,* Bhandarkar, op. cit.
12. D.C. Sircar, 'Ladahapura Inscription of the time of Jayachchandra, V.S. 1230', in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 32, part 7 (Delhi, 1960), pp. 305–9. The contents of the record have been discussed also in D.C. Sircar, *Studies in Political and Administrative Systems in Ancient and Medieval India*, pp. 82–7.
13. For the Gāhaḍavālas, see Roma Niyogi, *The History of the Gāhaḍavāla Dynasty* (Calcutta, 1959).
14. *Samvit* appears to mean the venue of an assembly and is likely to correspond to *samvid* of *Manusmṛti*, 8. 218–19.
15. *Cakṣurvadhaḥ* has been explained by Sircar as 'slaughter-at-sight', op. cit.
16. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 32, part 7, p. 307.
17. *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. 2, 2nd revised edition (Institute of Kannada Studies, University of Mysore, 1973), pp. 513–14. T.V. Mahalingam refers to a similar dispute, centring on the sharing of the produce of temple land, between the Śaiva and Vaisnava priests of a place called Tirumayam, in the Hoysaḷa period. The dispute was adjudicated by a 'special tribunal' composed of the members of the *nāḍu*, the *samayamantris* or the royal priests, the priests of both the sects belonging to Tirumayam and important temples of the neighbourhood and presided over by the Hoysaḷa general Appanna Daṇḍanāyaka, see *South Indian Polity*, 2nd edition (University of Madras, Madras, 1967), p. 225.
18. I.W. Mabbett, *Truth, Myth and Politics in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1972), p. 111.
19. For the text of the inscription, see D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I (From the Sixth Century BC to the Sixth Century AD), 2nd edition (Calcutta University, 1965), pp. 79–80.
20. Ibid., pp. 82–3. This inscription refers to the administration (*śāsana*) of the *mahāmātras* at Śrāvastī, to the presence of three-storeyed *koṣṭhāgāras* at villages and to the distribution of grains, obviously, through official channels, at the time of famine.
21. For example, see R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, 3rd edition (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 126–7.
22. The nature of the Mauryan state has been the theme of some lively debate in recent times. Some relevant bibliographical references are to be found in B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, pp. 15–16.

23. Aśoka's Major Rock Edict 13, Shahbazgarhi version; see D.C. Sircar, 'Select Inscriptions', vol. I, pp. 34–7.
24. Aśoka's Delhi-Topra Pillar Edict IV; see D.C. Sircar, 'Select Inscriptions', vol. I, p. 57.
25. Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, translated from the French with additions by J. Duncan M. Derrett, Indian reprint (Delhi, 1973), p. 226.
26. For example, in the concept of *dharma-vijaya* in Brāhmaṇical texts, which is distinguished from *asura-vijaya* and *lobha-vijaya*, the conquered dominion exists autonomously in relation to the conquering state. Aśoka's *dhaṃma-vijaya*, on the other hand, discards territorial conquest altogether; it envisages unification through *dhaṃma* because the recommended code of behaviour constituting *dhaṃma* would remain identical in all cases. For the concept of *dhaṃma-vijaya*, see Aśoka's Major Rock Edict 13, Shahbazgarhi version; D.C. Sircar, 'Select Inscriptions', vol. I, pp. 34–7. U.N. Ghoshal cites Kālidāsa to show that Raghu as a righteous conqueror (*dharmavijayī*) took away the wealth (though not the dominion) of a conquered king: see *A History of Indian Political Ideas* (The Ancient Period and the Period of Transition to the Middle Ages), reprinted with corrections (Madras, 1966), p. 356.
27. G.M. Bongard-Levin and A.A. Vigasin, 'Society and State in Ancient India', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 5, parts 1–2 (1978–9), pp. 16–30. For details, see A.A. Vigasin and A.M. Samozvantsev, *Society, State and Law in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1985), ch. I.
28. The expression appears to be mistakenly used here for 'idea' or 'concept'.
29. For relevant material see, P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India), vol. 3, 2nd edition (Poona, 1973), passim; also R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, passim.
30. Cited in R.C. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 14.
31. See the text of the Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela in D.C. Sircar, 'Select Inscriptions', vol. I, pp. 213–20.
32. *Arthaśāstra*, II.7.2; see R.P. Kangle, *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra*, part 2, 2nd edition (University of Bombay, 1972), p. 81.
33. *Yājñavalkyasmrti*, I.361.
34. Ibid., I.342–3.
35. *Manusmṛti*, 8.41 and 46, cited in P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. 3, p. 859.
36. Ibid.; ch. 33; also Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1962), pp. 143–4.
37. Robert Lingat, op. cit., p. 224.
38. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, cited by R.S. Sharma, 'Rājaśāsana: Meaning, Scope and Application', in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 37th session (Calicut, 1976), pp. 76–7.
39. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, reprint of 2nd edition (University of Madras, Madras, 1975), pp. 447, 461.
40. Ibid., p. 461.

41. Ibid., ch. 18, p. 487. In branding K.A. Nilakanta Sastri as a historian who repeatedly talked about Cola centralized administration when such centralization is not warranted by evidence, his references to dharma and to the local bodies are often overlooked. He, however, did not posit any contradiction between 'central government' and 'local authority', and would consider these two spheres of authority as complementary to each other. Note, for example, what he says further on legislation: 'What legislation there was took the form of declarations (*vyavasthās*) by local associations of sorts, meant to meet the requirements of new situations as they arose. Such declarations in so far as they conformed to a general conception of what was fair and proper (dharma); that is in so far as they commanded support from the public opinion of the class or group concerned, formed part of the social code, and were liable in the ultimate resort to be enforced by the king's government' (ibid., p. 461). Cf. also T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, ch. 8.1.
42. G.S. Dikshit, *Local Self-government in Medieval Karnataka* (Dharwar, 1964), p. 181.
43. K.R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas* (Delhi, 1980), pp. 20–1.
44. R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd revised edition (Delhi, 1991), p. 347.
45. Note the contradiction in the way R.S. Sharma characterized Mauryan bureaucracy, which is distinguishable in qualitative terms from modern bureaucracy. Sharma feels that the 'ancient bureaucracy seems to have been dominated by the brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas' but at the same time makes the following statement: '. . . we cannot overlook the fact that the orders issued by the central government operated even in distant areas, *though guilds, caste/kin organisations and local potentates also managed the local administration*' (emphasis added): see *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, pp. 401–2.
46. Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India*, p. 2.
47. *Nāradasmṛti*, 1.1–2; the translation is from Richard W. Lariviere, *The Nāradasmṛti 2* (Philadelphia, 1989), p. 3.
48. For origin of the state in early Indian political thought, see R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, chs. 4 and 5.
49. For discussions on the *Saptāṅga* theory of the state, see R.S. Sharma, op. cit., ch. 3; U.N. Ghoshal, op. cit., pp. 84–6. The constituent elements of the state were also called *prakṛtis*.
50. *Manusmṛti*, VII.17. See also Charles Drekmeier, op. cit., pp. 10–11. The antiquity of the identification of *daṇḍa* with dharma has been stressed in *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, I.354; *dharmo hi daṇḍarūpeṇa brāhmaṇa nirmitaḥ purā*, that is, '*dharma* was created in the form of *daṇḍa* by Brahman in the past'.
51. R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, ch. 3.

52. H. Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition* (Leiden, New York and Kobenhavn, Köln, 1989), p. 3.
53. *Nāradasmṛti*, 1.7 and 1.10 op. cit., pp. 4, 5.
54. R.S. Sharma, 'Rājaśāsana: Meaning, Scope and Application'.
55. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990), chs. 1 and 5.
56. Although the assumption is implicit in most nationalist historical writings that local bodies were institutions organized, and functioning, democratically, the admission that sharp inequality characterized such institutions is present even in this genre of writing. G.S. Dikshit (op. cit., p. 181), for example, initially tries to explain this away by suggesting that '. . . the leaders represented the people'; he, however, admits that while the *mahājanas* or the Brāhmaṇa members of *agrahāra* organizations talked about 'the principle that all were equal and should share alike, the principle applied only to themselves. They did not allow others to buy their share of landed property, in some *agrahāras*. The segregation of untouchables was quite common in this period, as before and later.'

CHAPTER 8

Historical Context of the Early Medieval Temples of North India*

I. The Context in Historiography

Temples, more than any other monuments, symbolized what could be considered majestic and memorable in the structural landscape of early medieval India, and it is understandable that there is a huge corpus of literature which has come to be written about them. They represent, in their surviving structural forms as well as in various stages of their dilapidation, perhaps the most typical and universal symbol of a religious centre not only of early medieval but of 'Hindu' India in general, although the historical reasons for their emergence and typicality are not normally probed. Writings on temples focus mainly on their architectural features, the ways these features correspond to or deviate from the impressive bulk of *Śilpaśāstra* texts, and on evolutions of regional styles of temple architecture. There are excellent works also on general metaphysical–symbological background of Hindu temples;[1] detailed investigations into religious and iconographical dimensions of what a single or a complex of temples presents have also been undertaken.[2] For many years now, a multi-volume series of encyclopaedic nature has been under preparation and regular publication, ensuring easy access to details of individual temples and temple complex sites in their respective spatial and temporal locations.[3] Even so, looking at temples as cultural products of the ages in which they came up, a historian may perhaps be left with the feeling that historical studies of temples, in so far as they are able to depart from purely technical architectural, iconographic or highly

*This is a slightly modified version of my 'Historiography, History and Religious Centers: Early Medieval North India, circa AD 700–1200', published in Vishakha N. Desai and Darielle Mason, eds, *Gods, Guardians and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India, AD 700-1200* (New York, Ahmedabad, 1993).

philosophical approach, continue to make use of art historical terminologies embedded in what was originally a derived vision of Indian history.

Historiographically, the image-making of India's past which began in the period of colonial domination has had the image of European history as a constant reference point; comparisons with images of the European past, whether the motivations have been for colonial historiography or historiography represented by writings of Indian nationalist historians, are implicit in uses of such terms as 'Classical' or 'Feudal'. In organizing their data on India's past, whether at the level of pan-Indian history-writing or at the level of regional history, historians have thus looked for such periods which may be labelled as 'Classical' and with which other phases of history may be contrasted.[4]

That the image of the period 700–1200 in which major temple centres came up in different parts of India and with which the present essay is concerned has been thus affected even in sharply contrasted historical approaches is due to several reasons. One is the tendency to expect the geographical boundary of India to correspond, even in the context of early India, to one political entity, and, therefore, to view periods in which territorial limits of a state were extensive as high watermarks of Indian history. By contrast, periods with comparatively minor states were viewed as marking a fall from the expected standard. For example, while the period of the Maurya empire (close of the fourth century BC to the beginning of the second century BC) was seen as characterized by a territorially extensive, centralized empire, the period that followed was marked by numerous autonomous centres of power and was, therefore, despite radically different characterization of the period in recent times, often viewed as a 'dark' period of Indian history. Similarly, the period of Gupta rule (beginning of the fourth to the middle of the sixth century) is seen as marking a new resurgence. Samudragupta, an early Gupta ruler who carved out a large territorial kingdom by doing away with a large number of small political entities, was hailed as an 'Indian Napoleon'[5] even by the imperialist historian Vincent Smith; this is also the period which is further generally marked out as India's 'Golden Age' or the 'Classical Age'[6]—a characterization which encompasses all aspects of early Indian culture as well.

In India, historiography, thus, the tendency has been, whether among imperialist historians or among those who represent a nationalist approach, to view post-Gupta society and culture in terms of a deviation from classical norms, the fine elements of classical culture having thinned out

gradually and taken on decadent and purely regional shapes in later centuries.[7]

This view has acquired new dimensions in historical writings which powerfully posit crystallization of a 'Feudal' society in early medieval India.[8] Although it is no longer fashionable to invoke European comparisons, the image of this society closely approximates the image of West European society following the fall of Rome. On the Indian political scene too barbarians such as the Hūṇas make their appearance, and the political history of the post-Gupta and particularly post-Harṣa period shows an abundance of mostly local kingdoms strewn all over the subcontinent. The political order in these kingdoms was highly hierarchized, with the monarch wielding nominal power, actual power having been exercised by the vassals of the king like the *mahāsāmantas, sāmantas* and others down the scale. How wide the hierarchical range was is often demonstrated by citing a normative text on art, *Aparājitapṛcchā*,[9] written during the rule of the Caulukyas of Gujarat in the twelfth century. The text which, in one section, is concerned with the types of residences to be constructed for different tiers of landed aristocracy, specified such ranks, in addition to those of others, as *daṇḍanāyaka, mahāmaṇḍaleśvara, māṇḍalika, mahāsāmanta, sāmanta, laghusāmanta, caturaṃśika* and *svalparāṣṭra*.[10]

Feudal social formation, crystallizing in post-Gupta, post-'classical' India but beginning much earlier, of course envisages a much more widely significant range of social change. It is stressed that in the early historical period, which was pre-feudal, society was open, urbanized and cosmopolitan; there was a marked shift from the Gupta period onward to a closed society and economy. Early Indian urban civilization which reached its zenith during the Śaka–Kuṣāṇa period (first century BC–third century AD) and which displayed networks of wide-ranging territorial and inter-civilizational contacts, is seen to have started declining from the Gupta period onward. What followed were increasing ruralization, total localization of artisanal products and decline of the mercantile community.[11] The shift from urban to rural is reflected in the nature of early medieval culture as well. The typical urbanite of the 'classical' age was the *nāgaraka* or the affluent city-dweller, whose refined culture is held up as a model to be emulated in Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*, a treatise not only on physical love but on a cultured lifestyle as well.[12] By contrast, the elites of early medieval India had essentially rural bases and radically different cultural orientations. Deprived of an urban milieu and patronage from a wide cross-section of society, art activities came to depend

essentially on the patronage of the rural aristocracy and thus became increasingly localized and regionalized. The decadence of the Hindu society in what is seen as its 'Feudal' period comes through quite strongly in the assessment made by K.M. Panikkar almost five decades back:

> Another problem that faces the student is the decadence which seems to have overtaken Hindu society in the period between the 8th and the 12th centuries. That there has been a marked decadence over large areas *is well attested by facts*. Our architecture, literature, scientific thought and all other spheres of activity proclaim loudly not only a decay of taste and interest, but a change of attitude which is truly remarkable. From the simple beginnings of the early temple pictures on the Bharhut railings to the more elaborate structure of the extant temples of the Gupta period we have a natural development of considerable significance, vigorous and artistic but without any touch of sensuality. But in the 9th and 10th centuries, Hindu temple architecture in North India is overloaded with sculptures the beauty of which should not obscure the sensuality and often the obscenity of the themes portrayed. The Khajuraho and Orissa temples for all their magnificence testify to a *degeneration of the Hindu mind* . . . [emphasis added].[13]

The above quote is intended to show how closely a general notion, articulated by a historian five decades ago, approximates the perspectives of many art historians who view early medieval art as 'feudal', created through the patronage deriving from the feudal royal court and related institutions, the major concerns of which were 'war and sex'.[14]

The above sweeping assessment of early medieval society and culture is, on many counts, inadequate, particularly because it does not offer a clear explanation of how Indian society and culture came to acquire certain specific characteristics in the post-'classical' phase. Admittedly, the society that created Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Mathura, Karle or Sarnath was vastly different from the society which created Khajuraho, Modhera, Dilwara, Osian, Konarak or Udayeśvara. However, unless we understand properly the processes through which the social world had been transformed, it would be difficult indeed to locate and decode the meanings of the cultural products of that world. The task we attempt to undertake in the next section is to explore the major historical processes which shaped the pattern of early medieval north Indian society and culture.

II. Early Medieval Historical Processes

To think in terms of geographical and political boundaries as static would be anachronistic, particularly in the context of early India. It is therefore necessary, when we make a fresh attempt to understand the formation of

the society and culture of post-'classical' India, to state how the region which constitutes the focus of this essay was perceived in contemporary evidence. Schemes of regional divisions present in texts define north India in various terms. A broad division existed since early historical times between *Uttarāpatha* and *Dakṣiṇāpatha*, aimed at differentiating the region to the north of the Vindhyas from the region to their south, but neither was homogeneous.[15] The actual historical regions were mentioned in the forms of *janapadas*, and while names of many old *janapadas* such as Kosala (northeast Uttar Pradesh), Magadha (south Bihar), Kaliṅga (Orissa), etc. continued into later times, new *janapada* names, in a sense suggesting crystallization of a stable politico-social order in a region, or more appropriately, a subregion, kept appearing in the records. For example, names of new *janapadas* like Gauḍa and Kāmarūpa in eastern India or Ḍāhala in central India started appearing regularly in records from the Gupta period onward.[16] At a later stage, terms like Gurjarātra, signifying the region associated with the Gurjaras in western India; Sapādalakṣa, the territory of the Cāhamānas; Medapāṭa, the territory of the Guhilas; Candrātreya-*bhukti*, the territory of the Candellas[17]—are all indicative of the process of geographical–historical transformation.

It needs to be added that the *janapadas* whether they corresponded to the domain of a ruling lineage or other types of regions, were perceived as different from another category of geographical space, the *aṭavi* or *araṇya* or the forest region, the *janapadas* and the *aṭavi* representing two distinct cultural patterns in contemporary perceptions. By way of elucidating this distinction, reference may be made to the way Bāṇabhaṭṭa, a contemporary of King Harṣavardhana (first half of the seventh century) and creator of a literary version of Harṣavardhana's biography in his *Harṣacarita*, described, although not in formal terms, the differential culture characteristics of the physical geographical space of his time. Bāṇabhaṭṭa's Śrīkaṇṭha—*janapada* (now in modern Haryana)—in which was located Harṣa's early capital Thaneswar, was a region of settled agriculture, well irrigated and producing varieties of crops. By contrast, the Vindhyas, the archetype of a forest region, was the habitat of hunters and primitive agriculturists; this image of the forest region, where lived tribes like the Bhils, the Śabaras, the Pulindas and the Niṣādas, continued to figure in later texts like the *Kathāsaritsāgara*.[18]

Two immediate qualifications must be made to this distinction to clarify the early medieval pattern further. One is that the forest regions as well as regions peripheral to settled agriculture were getting transformed on a significant scale. Second, within the settled *janapadas* too space was differentiated in that it could have a wide variety of habitats

from a small village to other settlement units to big cities. In other words, space was being constantly transformed, and the emergence of the pattern of early medieval society and culture was closely interwoven with the process of transformation of geographical space, because transformation of geographical space indicated the direction of the transformation of society and culture.[19]

In our view, the core element of this transformation was the appearance of state society in areas which had remained peripheral for long. For example, while edicts of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka (third century BC) refer to the people of the *aṭavi* or the forest,[20] there had emerged, in the same region, a number of *āṭavika-rājyas* or forest kingdoms in the Gupta period.[21] Reference to a *Pulinda-rāja-rāṣṭra* or the domain of a tribal chief as a part of a somewhat larger kingdom, in the same period,[22] is equally illustrative. Indeed, from the Gupta period onward, epigraphical documents mentioning new royal lineages and their kingdoms emanate from regions some of which, like Bastar in Madhya Pradesh and Koraput in Orissa,[23] are even now considered remote from nuclear, major river valley-oriented civilizational spaces. The transformation of peripheral spaces into local, royal domains was sometimes a result of territorial expansion. One often hears of monarchical expeditions undertaken against such tribal groups as Śabaras, Pulindas, Bhillas or Ābhīras.[24] Mostly, however, the transformation was from within the 'peripheral' society, resulting from regular interaction with society where the state system had evolved previously. In other words, most local kingdoms emerged out of what had originally been bases of tribal society and not through the breaking up of a given state structure. Thus the early medieval Candella rulers of Jejāka-*bhukti* (Bundelkhand) who constructed the magnificent clusters of the temples of Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh are believed to have come from the ethnic group of Gonds of central India.[25]

In many ways, the origin of the Rajputs illustrates the major historical processes, essentially deriving from cultural elements present in 'classical' society, involved in reshaping that society. The period between the seventh century and the twelfth century witnessed gradual rise of a number of new royal lineages in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, which came to constitute a social–political category known as 'Rajput'. Some of the major royal lineages were the Pratihāras of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and adjacent areas, the Guhilas and the Cāhamānas of Rajasthan, the Caulukyas or Solankis of Gujarat and Rajasthan and the Paramāras of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Some

others who too claimed to be Rajputs included the Candellas of Bundelkhand and the Gāhaḍavālas who ruled in the upper and middle Ganga valley from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The lineages which claimed, at different points of time, to be Rajputs were of disparate origins and indeed the category remained an excellent example of many channels through which an upwardly mobile social group could enhance its status. What brought the disparate groups together in early medieval India were acquisition of political power over roughly definable territories, control over economic resources basically through shared control over land and trade routes, construction of forts on a large scale for military as well as economic purposes and gradually expanding inter-lineage social network.[26]

Another significant historical process which the appearance of the Rajputs in early medieval India reveals relates to the ideological dimensions of the period. The dimension of ideology which comes through most clearly from contemporary records was the legitimization of temporal power. State formation among the Rajputs, or for that matter the process of state formation in general, was invariably associated with the practice of grants of land to Brāhmaṇas, temples, *maṭhas*, and *vihāras*, the scale of such grants having been definitely on the increase in the medieval period. Such grants reinforced the nexus between royal power and sacred authority. Royal power, mostly emerging from obscure origins, required legitimacy which it derived by extending worldly patronage to the highest varṇa, that is, Brāhmaṇa varṇa monopolizing sacred knowledge and to sacred centres, and, in turn, being assigned ancestry recognized as respectable. The rulers, essentially from tribal backgrounds, could thus claim Kṣatriya origin and trace descent, as some Rajput lineages did, from mythical lineages like the *Sūryavaṃśa* (solar lineage) or the *Candravaṃśa* (lunar lineage). New myths could be created or old myths modified to secure an upcoming group the required status and cohesion.[27] For example, the *agnikula* myth (that is, myth of origin from the fire-pit) used by several Rajput clans to explain their origin, was first used to trace their genealogy by the Paramāras of Malwa in an inscription of the eleventh century at the Udayeśvara temple in Madhya Pradesh: '. . . a hero who had sprung from the fire-altar of Vasishṭha on the Mount Arbuda (Abu) slew the enemies and brought back the cow of the sage which Viśvāmitra had taken away, and was, in reward of this deed, given the name of Paramāra (slayer of the foes) by Vasishṭha who also blessed him with kingship.'[28] Incidentally, the same epigraph, while eulogizing the achievements of Paramāra ruler Bhoja, records that he 'covered the

world all around with temples dedicated to Kedāra, Rāmeśvara, Somanātha, Suṇḍīra (?), Kāla, Anala and Rudra',[29] all referring to different manifestations of Śiva. The essence of royal power and the lustre of a Kṣatriya could also be bestowed by an *ācārya* or a *guru*; a thirteenth century epigraph eulogizes Pāśupata *ācārya* Hāritarāśi by attributing the rise of the Rajput Guhila lineage of Mewar in the following terms: 'Assuredly from Brahmā-like Hārita (Hāritarāśi = sage) Bappaka obtained, in the shape of an anklet, the lustre of a Kṣatriya and gave the sage his own devotion, his own Brāhmaṇical lustre. Thus even till now, the descendants of that line shine on this earth, like Kṣatriyahood in human form.'[30] The Candellas of Bundelkhand too traced their sacred ancestry from sage Candrātreya, who in turn, descended from mythical sacred personalities, Marīchī and Atri.[31]

The emergence of ruling lineages of diverse origins represents one dimension of how early medieval society came to be formed. If ruling lineages represented one category of elites, there emerged other groups too who can be seen to represent the same historical processes operating in different regional contexts. One distinct social group which makes itself noticeable in the records from the Gupta period onward was that of the Kāyastha, drawn from the ranks of scribes, accountants and so on; the Kāyasthas crystallized into distinct north Indian subcastes and were closely associated with new royal courts. Ancestries of modern Kāyastha castes like the Nigamas, Śrīvāstavas, Māthuras may be traced to early medieval records from Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan in the period with which the present essay is concerned.[32] What is significant is that like royal families the Kāyasthas too, as a literate elite group, project their own genealogies in modest imitation of royal genealogies. Equally significant was the emergence of merchant families, and often of distinct merchant lineages, particularly in western India. The ancestries of several merchant lineages figure in the early medieval epigraphical records of this region, the most frequent references being to those of the Dharkaṭas, Oswals, Śrīmālīs, Prāgvaṭas, etc.[33] The merchant lineages many of which were of Jaina affiliation also emulated the royalty in the manner they referred to their ancestry. How important some elite merchant families were can be gauged from the facts that there are many references to the Dharkaṭa *jāti* (caste) merchants in the inscriptions at the temple cluster at Osian[34] and that Vastupāla and Tejahpāla, perhaps the two most illustrious merchant personalities of early medieval India, were descended from the Prāgvaṭa lineage, were high-ranking officials of the rulers of Gujarat and were associated with the construction of a major Jaina temple at Arbudagiri or Mount Abu.[35]

Records from other regions like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh generally refer to the *śreṇī*, a term which is taken to denote a merchant guild or a guild of artisans. North Indian guilds of the early medieval period differed to a very great extent from the big merchant associations like the Ayyavole 500 or the Maṇigrāmam of contemporary Deccan and south India; they were more like castes pursuing particular professions, but they too were associated with important political and urban centres of the period. A very significant piece of information comes from a set of epigraphic records (AD 867–904) of the Gurjara–Pratihāra period from the city of Tattānandapura[36] which had its location near Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh. They refer to substantial donations made to the temple of a female deity Kāñcanśrīdevī; the donations came from the community of goldsmiths in the city. Obviously, the community had acquired wealth and status in the city to the extent of having a deity named after the community since *kāñcana* means gold. The social groups of early medieval India thus ranged from rulers claiming *cakravartī* status or the status of a universal monarch, their subordinates of various ranks such as *mahāsāmanta, mahāmāṇḍalika, sāmanta, māṇḍalika* and so on down the scale, diverse other groups mostly crystallized into regional or sub-regional *jātis* or castes to the level of severely oppressed communities which included the untouchables. The historical processes which gave rise to such a hierarchized, complex social structure also created a very complex cultural–ideological milieu. For the purpose of this essay, two aspects of this dimension of early medieval society need to be highlighted. One, the process of local state formation, which has been identified in this essay as the major process through which 'classical' India changed to early medieval India, resulted in the incorporation of many local cults into what is generally understood as Purāṇic Hinduism. This process may explain how purely local cults and deities came to be regarded as manifestations of deities like Śiva, Pārvatī or Viṣṇu who all symbolized supra-regional Hinduism. This may also tell us why tāntric practices, which were essentially esoteric practices, came to permeate the practices of not only Hinduism but also the erstwhile heterodox systems like Buddhism and Jainism.[37] At one level of Hinduism as well as in other systems, there was tremendous opposition to tāntricism and to such non-conformist sects as Kaulas and Kāpālikas. The allegorical play *Prabodhacandrodaya* written by Kṛṣṇa Miśra and staged at the court of a Candella ruler is evidence of the acrimony which certainly existed between followers of different sects in early medieval India.[38] At another level, however, there were elements which came to permeate different sects and their beliefs and rituals, a curious convergence of emotional bhakti

(devotion) and adherence to primordial tantra being recognizable in all major religious systems of the period.

In fact, the presence of common elements in the midst of diverse religious practices can be seen in the second major area of the cultural–ideological dimension of the period. This is reflected in the growth of the institution of the preceptor (the *ācārya* or the *guru*), the central figure in an institution like the *maṭha* or the monastery which often in combination with the temple constituted the sacred complex in a mundane landscape.[39] The royalty almost invariably subscribed to Brāhmaṇical ideology; *deva-dvija-guru-pūjā*,[40] or the worship of the deity (*deva*), the Brāhmaṇ (*dvija*) and the preceptor (*guru*) was expected of it. Elsewhere, there could often be opposition against the authority of the Brāhmaṇa and the ideology of varṇa, but bhakti (devotional surrender), which reflected the bond between an individual and his deity, was universal, and initiation into the correct path was done by the preceptor (the *ācārya* or the *guru*). The growth of the Hindu *maṭhas* or monasteries in the post-'classical' period, which somewhat paralleled the Buddhist and Jaina monastic orders, particularly among the Śaiva sects, was of momentous significance. Apart from being geographically quite widespread and being close to temporal power, the *maṭha* centres evolved a system of succession of *ācāryas*, who figure in epigraphic records in terms akin to genealogies of royal families. The *maṭhas* functioned as nodes in dissemination and networks of sectarian and philosophical traditions; their growing importance in early medieval society is attested by the fact that in the kingdom of the Kalacuris of Tripurī (near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh) alone, Śaiva temples and *maṭhas* controlled by Śaivite Mattamayūra sect were created at Gurgi, Masaun, Chandrehe, Bilhari, Bheraghat and other places.[41]

III. Spatial Contexts and Linkages

Religious centres which were the major loci where ritual activities reflected a wide range of other activities like the construction of structures by acclaimed architects, fashioning of images on a grand scale and performing arts like dance and music were, in keeping with the cultural–ideological complexity of the period, also of diverse kinds. One must keep in mind the fact that although by now Buddhism had lost its dominance and its distinct identity, major Buddhist centres like Nalanda, Vikramaśilā, Somapura Vihāra, Ratnagiri and Mainamati, all of which reveal massive structural and sculptural activities, continued to exist till

the close of the early medieval period.[42] However, what needs to be stressed is that it was the temple which had become the common structural feature all along the continuum of geographical space. One thus could have a modest temple structure in a dense forest or a hamlet, and the range of the spatial contexts of temples would further encompass villages, urban centres of various dimensions as well as spaces where, as in Osian in Rajasthan, Bhuvaneswar in Orissa, Pattadakal and Aihole in north Karnataka, temples dominated and constituted a sacred landscape. When a shrine to a deity called Araṇyavāsinī (dweller of the forest) was put up by a guild in south Rājasthan in the seventh century,[43] the shrine may be assumed to have been in an area away from settled locality. Similarly, when Dharmapāla, Pāla ruler of eastern India in the late eighth–early ninth century, was making a grant of villages for a deity, a *devakulikā* (a small temple shrine) for goddess Kādambarī—probably a local goddess absorbed into an ever-expanding Brāhmaṇical pantheon—was mentioned as a boundary mark of one of the villages;[44] the spatial context in this case was obviously rural. One can contrast this with the evidence from a major urban centre of the Gurjara–Pratihāra period, located in all likelihood, in the Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh. The set of epigraphic records which bear upon this urban centre called Sīyaḍoṇipattana range in date from 907 to 967 and show how temples, of different sectarian affiliations, were an integral part of what appears to have been a rather spacious commercial-manufacturing-cum-residential centre. There were temples dedicated to deities called in the records as Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭāraka, Śivabhaṭṭāraka, Bhaillaśvamī, Sīgākīyadeva and so on.[45] It is unlikely that at Sīyaḍoṇipattana, or for that matter at other settlements of this kind, sacred space was exclusive and separated from commercial and residential space. The admixture of different types of space in areas of settlement suggested close physical proximity between deities and their devotees. This was, however, not the only pattern; as mentioned earlier, major temple structures with subsidiary structures or clusters of temples constituting a sacred landscape could be marked off from mundane space; remote *tīrtha* or pilgrimage centres too required the devotees to cover wide stretches of inhospitable terrain to achieve closeness to a deity. Nevertheless, in order to understand how crucial the temple had become in the practice of everyday religion, even when all sections of society could not have access into it, it is necessary to keep in mind the varieties of spatial contexts in which the temples figured.

The linkages which the temple, admittedly the key religious centre for the early medieval society, represented could also be of many kinds.

These linkages were made possible at one level by the absence of exclusivity of sacred space, a feature demonstrated by the fact that at any particular settlement or sacred site, structures with different sectarian affiliations could coexist; this was made possible also by cases where, for example, a deity of Brāhmaṇical affiliation could assume Jaina characteristics. The Osian complex in Rajasthan bears evidence to both: temples dedicated to deities of different sectarian affiliations coexist at this centre; further, Saccikā Devī (popularly known as Saciyā Mātā and regarded as the titular deity of the Oswal merchant community) occupied a prominent place at Osian and existed alongside her Brāhmaṇical prototype Mahiṣāsuramardinī.[46] Such centres could thus enlarge the network of linkages among communities and forge a considerable measure of social integration.

Linkages mediated through temples operated at other levels as well. Early medieval India experienced the emergence of royal cult centres in different parts of India, and like monarchical power representing integration of different political segments into a state structure, the royal cult centre too could represent integration of local cults and their centres. The symbiotic relationship between a monarch and what grew to be a royal cult centre, and the growing perception of this relationship as perhaps the foremost cultural symbol of a region, is best illustrated by the cult of Puruṣottama-Jagannātha of Orissa;[47] the deity became the ruler of the region and the monarch his representative. A similar symbiotic relationship developed between the Guhila rulers of Mewar and Śaivite deity Ekaliṅga, the relationship having been forged over centuries by the Pāśupata Śaivas who were in control of the shrine of Ekaliṅga.[48] The Guhila rulers too functioned as the *diwans* of Ekaliṅga, the deity being the sovereign of the realm.

Temple centres, as we have seen, were of various dimensions, and in addition to the symbolic significance attaching to major centres like the royal cult centres, a centre's network in terms of its regular social linkages depended very much on the way resources of the society were provided to it by various elite groups. We shall illustrate this point by citing evidence on two centres, one from the kingdom of the Kalacuris of Tripurī in Madhya Pradesh and another from that of Nadol Cāhamānas of the Marwar region in Rajasthan. The Kalacuri record which dates to the close of the tenth century comes from Bilhari. Beginning with an invocation to Śiva, the inscription[49] records at one stage gifts of several villages, numbering at least nine, to different Śaiva *ācāryas* by a Kalacuri queen Nohalā, whose paternal family was that of Caulukya rulers. The

final part of the record is concerned with specifying a number of levies which were imposed on different items of merchandise at the market-place (*pattanamaṇḍapikā*) at Bilhari; the levies were resources allocated to a monastery (*maṭha*) called Nohaleśvara, obviously named after queen Nohalā, and presided over by a Śaiva *ācārya* Aghoraśiva. The levies were imposed on items like salt, product from oil presses, betel nuts, black pepper, dried ginger, etc.; they were imposed also on horses and elephants, suggesting the presence of long-distance, specialized merchants at the marketplace.

The evidence for a temple and monastery centre in the kingdom of the Nadol Cāhamānas of Rajasthan is available from a set of twelfth century copperplates from Nanana in eastern Marwar.[50] The central deity is called Tripuruṣa in the records which also refer to a *maṭha*; they mention other deities too, all named after the members of the royal family and enshrined in the temple complex. There are, for example, references to deities Lakṣmaṇasvāmī, Candaleśvara, Padmaleśvara, Ṣāhanapāleśvara, Sahajapāleśvara and so on. The Nanana plates thus appear to pertain to what grew up to be a royal cult centre, although it may not have existed as one beyond the twelfth–thirteenth century and was by no means comparable to major centres like Puruṣottama-Jagannātha or Ekaliṅga. The significant information one gains from details in the plates relates to the way resources allocated to the centre created its economic and social network.[51] At least two deities enshrined in the complex received grants of villages; so did the *maṭhapati* or the head of the monastery. Temple-girls, musicians and others providing different types of services to the complex received shares of agricultural produce from villages earmarked for the purpose. The resources were often redistributed and reallocated among different sections for whom the temple complex was the nucleus of their daily activities. What is most interesting is that the Nanana plates also refer to individual cultivators as well as families of cultivators gifted to the temple complex not only by members of the royal family but by private donors as well, although the exact significance of such gifts is not clear. The Bilhari record from Madhya Pradesh and the Nanana plates from Rajasthan are only two sets of records from among thousands. Many provide greater details and clearer indications that temple centres did not exist apart from other institutions in society; they indeed existed through a network of linkages which held together the fabric of early medieval society.

The points that we have been trying to highlight above may now be summed up. The major features of the society that we have reviewed

appear in a large measure dissimilar to what constituted Indian society and culture down to the period of the Guptas. Even so, characterizing early medieval society as *degenerate* or as polar opposite of early society does not offer an adequate understanding of it. That understanding has to come through by making reference to the historical processes which went into the making of early medieval society and to the manner in which cultural institutions, practices and symbols of the period are intelligible in regional contexts as well as at a pan-Indian level. The rapid growth in the number and networks of temple centres, whose origins certainly date to pre-Gupta times, thus become understandable when we begin to appreciate how closely they were linked, as were Brāhmaṇa-dominated *brahmadeyas* and *agrahāras*, with the formation of subregional and regional kingdoms and their legitimization, consolidation of their resource bases and the process of the forging of linkages across communities for social integration.

Notes and References

1. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, 2 vols (Calcutta, 1946).
2. For an excellent recent study, see Devangana Desai, *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* (Bombay, 1996).
3. The series titled *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, edited by Michael W. Meister and coordinated by M.A. Dhaky is being published since 1983. Vol. I, pt. I was published by the American Institute of Indian Studies and University of Pennsylvania Press.
4. For the use of the term 'Classical' in the context of Indian history, which extends to the characterization of Indian art as well, the best example would be: *The Classical Age* which is volume 3 in the series *History and Culture of the Indian People* edited by R.C. Majumdar and his associates (2nd impression, Bombay, 1962). The term 'Feudal' too has been variously used in the Indian context; relevant references will be found in H. Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1981), 273–310; D.N. Jha, 'Editor's Introduction', in D.N. Jha, ed., *Feudal Social Formation in Early India* (Delhi, 1987); B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity in Early Medieval India: Problems of Perspective', Presidential Address; Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 44th session (Burdwan, 1983). It must at the same time be pointed out that writings on India's past do not necessarily and always suggest comparability between Indian and European history. In fact, the two interrelated notions which have strongly influenced and continue to influence Western perspectives on India and which sharply differentiate between Occidental and Asian History are those of 'Oriental Despotism' and 'unchanging East'.

For relevant discussions, see B.O' Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism and Indian History* (Oxford–Cambridge, Mass., 1989); R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford–Cambridge, Mass., 1990), chs. 4, 5; R. Thapar, 'Interpretations of Ancient Indian History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 1–25.

5. V.A. Smith, *Early History of India, From 600 BC to the Muhammadan Conquest, Including the Invasion of Alexander the Great*, 4th edition, revised by S.M. Edwards (Oxford, 1924), p. 306.
6. In addition to *The Classical Age* edited by R.C. Majumdar and cited in note 1, read also the remark by K.K. Dasgupta: 'Indeed, the advent of the Guptas on the political stage ushered in an epoch which has rightly been called the "Golden Age" or the "Classical period" of Indian history . . .' 'Preface', in R.C. Majumdar and K.K. Dasgupta, eds, *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (AD 300–985) (Delhi, 1981).
7. For an articulation of the approach, see Niharranjan Ray, 'The Medieval Factor in Indian History', General President's Address, Indian History Congress, 29th session (Patiala, 1967); Niharranjan Ray, in his introductory paragraph reviewing the sculptural art of the early medieval period, comments elsewhere: 'The eighth and ninth centuries saw the consolidation of that process of conscious regionalism that had made itself felt already in the seventh century. For a whole millennium, roughly from about the third century BC to about the seventh century AD, Indian art admits, despite local variations due to local tastes and visions, of a common denominator at each different stage of evolution and fulfilment. . . . The *classical* tradition of an all-India art lingers for one or two centuries, but the regional spirit gets the better of the Indian', R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds, *The Struggle for Empire* (vol. 5 of *The History and Culture of the Indian People)* (Bombay, 1957), pp. 640–1. Compare these remarks with a more recent statement by Devangana Desai, 'Sculptural motifs were thoroughly subordinated to the regional architectural pattern . . . regional patterns had conditioned its (the erotic motif's) depiction in medieval art', 'Art under Feudalism in India (*c.* AD 500–1300)', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1974), 10–17. These comments are indeed telling, but they do not tell us about the historical processes leading to regionalization of cultures; this is primarily because Indian culture was assumed to be homogeneous in nationalist historiography.
8. The major early works which posit 'Feudal formation' in the Indian context are D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956); R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, c. 300–1200* (Calcutta, 1965); B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad, 1973).
9. The specialized monograph on the text is Lalmani Dubey, *Aparājitapṛcchā—A Critical Study* (Allahabad, 1987).

10. For relevant discussions see, R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes in Early Medieval India (circa AD 500–1200)* (Delhi, 1969); B.N.S. Yadava, op. cit., p. 149; R. Inden, 'Hierarchies of Kings in Early Medieval India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, vol. 15 (1981), 99–125. Also, L.M. Dubey, *Aparājitapṛcchā—A Critical Study*, ch. 4.
11. A recent detailed statement of this position is R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300–c. 1000)* (Delhi, 1987).
12. See translation of the text by S.C. Upadhyaya (Bombay, 1963).
13. K.M. Panikkar, 'Presidential Address', Indian History Congress, 18th Session (Calcutta, 1955), 17.
14. This approach, based on a substantial body of empirical evidence, is most forcefully articulated in Devangana Desai, op. cit.; idem., *Erotic Sculpture of India: A Socio-cultural Study* (New Delhi, 1975); idem., 'Social Dimensions of Art in Early India', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 50th session (Gorakhpur, 1989).
15. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *A Survey of the Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1984).
16. Reference to Kāmarūpa is found in the Allahabad Praśasti of the early Gupta period, D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1965), p. 265; *Ḍabhāla-rājya* (same as Ḍāhala), which was one of the eighteen *Aṭavi-rājyas* or 'forest kingdoms' is mentioned in a record of 529 from Khoh in Madhya Pradesh, ibid., p. 395. Gauḍa was the kingdom of Sasāṅka, a contemporary of Harṣa, in the seventh century; R.C. Majumdar, *The Classical Age*, pp. 77–8.
17. For regions of western India see, D. Sharma, General Editor, *Rajasthan Through the Ages*, vol. I (From the Earliest Times to 1316) (Bikaner, 1966), pp. 11–19; for Jejāka-*bhukti*, see S.K. Mitra, *The Early Rulers of Khajuraho*, 2nd revised edition (Delhi, 1977), pp. 1–11; P.K. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Madhya Pradesh from Early Records* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 135–9.
18. For relevant discussion, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990), ch. I.
19. This was so because transformation of a forest region or an area of tribal habitat would imply the beginnings of a stratified society, dominance of varṇa ideology, heterogeneity of social groups and many-stranded religious beliefs and practices. For these implications, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India*; also, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi, 1994).
20. References to *aṭavi* are found in different versions of Major Rock Edict 13 of Aśoka in a context which suggests that the forest people did not reconcile to the penetration of Mauryan imperial power into their region; for the text

of the Edict, see D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I, pp. 34–7.

21. D.C. Sircar, op. cit., p. 395.
22. K.N. Dikshit, 'Navagrama Grant of the Maharaja Hastin (G.E.[1] 98)', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 21 (1931–2) (reprinted, New Delhi, 1984), pp. 124–6.
23. For example, the Nalas who were certainly associated with Koraput and Bastar from the first half of the sixth century; R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Classical Age*, pp. 188–90. The spate in the emergence of local ruling lineages in Gupta and post-Gupta times is underlined in J.G. De Casparis, 'Inscriptions and South Asian Dynastic Tradition', in R.J. Moore, ed., *Tradition and Politics in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1979); B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity in Early Medieval India'; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, ch. 10.
24. F. Kielhorn, 'Two Chandella Inscriptions from Ajaygadh', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I (reprinted, New Delhi, 1971), p. 337; also, Munshi Deviprasad, 'Ghatiyala Inscription of the Pratihara Kakkuka', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1895, pp. 513–21; D.R. Bhandarkar, 'Gatiyala Inscriptions of Kakkuka: Samvat 918', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 9 (reprinted, New Delhi, 1981), pp. 277–81.
25. For discussion of different theories on the origin of the Candellas, see 'Origin of the Chandellas', in J.N. Asopa, *Origin of the Rajputs* (Delhi-Varanasi-Calcutta, 1976), pp. 208–17. Asopa of course traces their descent from an old Brāhmaṇ ruling lineage. Also S.K. Mitra, op. cit., ch. 2.
26. For analysis of different dimensions of the processes, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1976), pp. 59–83.
27. For the unusual origin myth which traces the ancestry of some local kingdoms through the protection given to a child by mice, see Romila Thapar, 'The Mouse in the Ancestry', in S.D. Joshi, ed., *Amritadhara* (Professor R.N. Dandekar Felicitation Volume) (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 429–30.
28. H.V. Trivedi, *Inscriptions of the Paramaras, Chandellas, Kachchhapaghatas and Two Minor Dynasties* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. 7, pt. 2), (New Delhi, 1978), p. 76.
29. Ibid., p. 79.
30. *A Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions* (Bhavnagar Archaeological Department, n.d.), p. 89.
31. F. Kielhorn, 'Inscriptions from Khajuraho', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, p. 130.
32. See Chitrarekha Gupta, 'The Writers' Class of Ancient India—Case Study in Social Mobility', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1983), 191–204; idem., *The Kāyasthas: A Study in the Formation and Early History of a Caste* (Calcutta, 1996).

33. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Markets and Merchants in Early Medieval Rajasthan', *Social Science Probings*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1985), 413–40; V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India (AD 1000–1300)* (New Delhi, 1990), ch. 9.
34. Devendra Handa, *Osian: History, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Delhi, 1984), ch. 6.
35. V.K. Jain, op. cit., pp. 245–9.
36. D.R. Sahni, 'Ahar Stone Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 19 (1927–8) (reprinted, New Delhi, 1983), pp. 52–6.
37. S.B. Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, 3rd edition (Calcutta, 1974). For tantric elements in Jainism, R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan* (Delhi, 1973), chs. 9, 10; R.B.P. Prasad, *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka (c. AD 500–1200)* (New Delhi, 1975), ch. 3.
38. *Prabodhachandrodaya of Kṛṣṇa Miśra*, Sanskrit text with English translation by S.K. Nambiar (Delhi, 1971).
39. Sergio Meliton Carrasco Alvarez, 'Brāhmaṇical Monastic Institutions in Early Medieval North India: Studies in Their Doctrinal and Sectarian Background, Patronage and Spatial Distribution', Ph.D. dissertation (Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1990).
40. D.N. Jha, 'State Formation in a Peripheral Region: The Case of Early Medieval Chamba', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 197–210.
41. V.V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri–Chedi Era* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. IV, pt. I) (Ootacamund, 1955), Cli.
42. Debala Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* (Calcutta, 1971), pp. 85–9, 225–32, 240–6.
43. The *devakula* (shrine) of Araṇyavāsinī, the 'forest deity', was established at Araṇyakūpagiri; R.R. Halder, 'Samoli Inscription of the Time of Siladitya; [Vikrama-Samvat] 703', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 20 (1929–30) (reprinted, New Delhi, 1983), pp. 97–9.
44. F. Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapaladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 4 (1896–97) (reprinted, New Delhi, 1979), pp. 243–54.
45. F. Kielhorn, 'Siyadoni Stone Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, pp. 162–79. The evidence of this inscription has been analysed in some detail in B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and Urban Centres in Early Medieval North India', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. I, no. 2 (1974), pp. 203–19.
46. Devendra Handa, op. cit., pp. 14–17, 52–5.
47. A. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G.C. Tripathi, *The Cult of Jagannāth and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (Delhi, 1978).
48. For a study of the relationship between the Guhilas, the Lākulīśa Pāśupatas and the shrine of Ekaliṅga, see Nandini Sinha, 'Guhila Lineages and the Emergence of State in Early Medieval Mewar', M. Phil. dissertation (Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1988).
49. V.V. Mirashi, op. cit., pp. 204–22.

50. D.C. Sircar, 'Stray Plates from Nanana', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 33, pp. 238–46; S. Sankaranarayan, 'Nanana Copperplates of the time of Kumārapāla and Ālhaṇa', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 39, pt. I, pp. 17–26.
51. For detailed analysis of the Nanana plates from this perspective, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India*, ch. 3.

CHAPTER 9

'Reappearance' of the Goddess or the Brāhmaṇical Mode of Appropriation: Some Early Epigraphic Evidence Bearing on Goddess Cults*

An integrated view of Indian Culture, the stated theme of the symposium in memory of Professor G.D. Sontheimer, to which the present essay is expected to relate, may evoke different approaches from different contributors, and, as a historian, I may start by stating how I would like to view the theme. Such a view, in my understanding, should imply:

(a) not only a recognition of the diversity of elements, be they 'tribal', 'folk', 'popular', 'classical' or whatever other categories of academic convenience one may invoke (this recognition being implicit in the notion of integration), but also an awareness that these elements need to be understood in terms of patterns of interrelatedness between them,

(b) this should also imply, since to a historian culture cannot be a given structure, recognition of a need to understand the dynamics of change over time, in which new ordering of various elements keeps on taking place;

(c) and, finally, since even within a framework of integration, cultural elements and symbols exist in states of dynamic interrelationship, there is also the need to understand the relationship of domination and subordination or marginalization within the frame. In other words, 'integration' does not mean complete dissolution of disparateness among various elements; as a historical notion

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> 'integration' therefore requires a probing into how and in what historical contexts certain elements become dominant in relation to others, and, how dominance becomes evident not only in the relative order of the elements but also in ways in which the essential meanings and symbols associated with different elements undergo change.

The present essay is concerned with an understanding of one aspect of the making of integrative Indian Culture, that is, the process of religious integration. Unless one insists on the ahistoric premise that Hinduism represents a monolithic religious structure, or a body of given doctrines, which was *sanātana*, then the historical evolution of Hinduism has to be viewed as a dynamic process of integration. At one level, this will require an understanding of the process of amalgamation or convergence[1] which of course was not a product of accident. One can excellently illustrate the kind of process being referred to by looking at the manner in which female divinities may figure in any historical mapping of Hinduism. I shall return to the theoretical aspects of the problem at a later stage; for the moment, I refer to the specific problem of this essay, that is, female divinities in the context of historically expanding contours of Hinduism.

I

In an interesting 'Foreword' written to introduce a monograph on 'Feminine Theology of India', Daniel Ingalls wrote:

> What is strange about the Indian record is . . . that in India the Goddess reappears. . . . I suspect that within India's diversified culture the worship of the Goddess never ceased. The two thousand year silence of the record may be explained by the fact that all our texts from that period are either in Sanskrit or closely related languages. Our earliest hymns to the Goddess . . . are the continuation of an old religion, not an invention. These first appear at the conjunction of *two historical processes* [emphasis added]. On the one hand, Sanskrit, by the third century, had become the nearly universal language of letters in India. On the other hand, the pre-Aryan worship of the Indians had spread by that time very widely among the Aryans. From the third or fourth century, at any rate, the religion of the Goddess becomes as much part of the Hindu written record as the religion of God.[2]

As a meaningful perspective on the historical development and structure of Hinduism—more particularly than those of Buddhism and Jainism—the suggestions embedded in Ingalls's statement surely merit

our attention, and since the suggested chronological point in Ingalls's 'conjunction' coincides remarkably well with the chronological starting point of the present investigation, it may be worthwhile to analyse the implications of Ingalls's statement in some detail. First, Ingalls seems to suggest, and rightly so, that the deep stratum of the worship of the goddess always lay embedded in Indian religious tradition and that this layer became historically and significantly visible through the mediation of texts written in what he would consider as 'the nearly universal language of letters in India'. One may add that the first major attempt to situate a universal theology of the goddess in the Indian religious tradition is to be seen in the *māhātmya* of the Devī or the goddess; this is an 'account of the glory' of the goddess in a codified form, which forms a part of a larger text, the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.[3] This, as a text, signifies one aspect of the coming into shape of a new form of Hinduism. Sometimes called Purāṇic Hinduism, because more than the Vedas and the allied texts the Purāṇas represent the essential structure of Hinduism as it is perceived and practised today, it represents a definitive evolutionary stage in the history of Hinduism because of its taking the focus of religious practice away from sacrificial ritual as also from exclusive bhakti. Ingalls's second suggestion points to the need to look for and locate the historical stage/stages in which the goddess emerges into the arena of written history in a significant way. Ingalls himself considers third-fourth century AD as a crucial stage in this regard. Finally, in Ingalls's suggestion, the appearance of the goddess from her 'primeval' background and her becoming 'as much part of the Hindu written record as the religion of God' denotes an obliteration of the dichotomy between Aryan and pre-Aryan tradition of worship. Many would not agree with Ingalls's dichotomy between Aryan and non-Aryan and may rather like to choose from such binary oppositions as 'Vedic and non-Vedic', 'Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic' or 'Brāhmaṇical and non-Brāhmaṇical', but let us, at this point, refer to other notions, which two recent researchers on Indian religion considered it necessary to develop in the course of their fieldwork. I refer first to the apparent dichotomy posited by Gunther Sontheimer between *vana* and *kṣetra*,[4] which is really not a dichotomy because Sontheimer rightly sees in the *kṣetra*, which is representative of the religious situation in a complex society, elements deriving from the *vana* or the forest. Sontheimer convincingly argues that the religion as we practise it today had its origin essentially in *vana* practices and establishes a correlation between *vana* in its religious connotation and the tribe. Elsewhere, I too have had occasion to argue that a major historical dichotomy—but, at the same time,

a process of transformation in Indian history—was represented by *araṇya* and *janapada*, and while *araṇya* or forest (the same as Sontheimer's *vana*) essentially represented the world of the tribe and its culture, the *janapadas* would stand for a more complex social structure dominated by the Brāhmaṇical ideology and perception of what the social order should be.[5]

A similar notion, equally pertinent to the understanding of a crucial stage in Indian religious tradition, is the transition, posited by Anncharlott Eschmann, between 'Sign' and 'Icon'.[6] According to Eschmann, 'Icon worship which is the ritual focus of present-day Hinduism' marks a radical departure from 'sacrifice' which was the key element of older Hinduism associated with the Vedas. The key element which marks 'later Hinduism', in which 'sacrifice' does not altogether cease, is *darśana* or 'seeing' the deity. The deity is established and permanently present; he is not 'first invited and dismissed with great ceremony'. The other key element is the performance of *upacāras* or services to this ever-present deity. 'The execution of the "services" is immensely complicated. *Mantras* (specific Sanskrit holy verses, whose flawless rendering in the appropriate ritual context, is of itself efficacious), prayers and invocations are to be recited, meditation, folding of hands and other gestures repeated, prostration, etc. to be performed. Hence, the practice of these rites is only for Brahmins who are expressly trained for this purpose.'[7]

The idea common to the writings cited above is that for an understanding of how the structure of Hindu worship expanded, the passage of individual cults and of centres of worship—and there would be innumerable such historical cases—from the unrecorded to the recorded, from often unascertainable roots to their historical visibility was, and continues to be, a key religious process. The process may of course imply changes of different scales, and often the changes were of such magnitude that it is only a discerning researcher who can penetrate into the deep stratum of an original cult or identify the different streams that converged into the making of another. The process, in any case, remains an initial perspective with which we may now proceed to examine select historical data bearing on the cults of goddesses in early India.

II

The historical evidence being presented here pertains approximately to the time-span between the fourth-fifth and the tenth centuries, which, as I have tried to show elsewhere, was a crucial period in the formation of

Indian society,[8] at least in so far as some of its continuing features are concerned. The earliest record that I cite is one of a set of recently discovered copperplate inscriptions from Bagh, otherwise long known as a famous centre of Buddhist art. The record originated in the reign of king Bhuluṇḍa and is dated in year 50[9] (that is, AD 369–70, if referred to the Gupta era).

According to the editors of the plate, the name Bhuluṇḍa represents a tribal (non-Sanskritic) form of personal name, to be replaced by such Sanskritized names of his successors as Svāmīdāsa, Rudradāsa, Bhaṭṭāraka and Nāgabhaṭa; they all ruled in succession as members of the same family of rulers from Balkha (Bagh in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh). The objective with which the copperplate was engraved was to record that Mahārāja Bhuluṇḍa installed (*pratiṣṭhāpita*) at a place called Navataṭāka, Mother Goddesses (*Bhagavatīnāṃ . . . Navaṭatāka-mātṛkānāṃ*, elsewhere also called *mahāmātṛṇām* or, Great Mothers). The record further stipulates that the villages Dubhedikā and Dharmāṇaka, entrusted with a Brāhmaṇa called Mūlaśarman, and a plot of land in a locality called Arjunapaṃtikā, entrusted with someone with the designation *bhūtabhojaka*, were granted by king Bhuluṇḍa for the performance of *bali, caru and satra* rites of the Mothers and to provide for perfume, incense and garlands (*gandha-dhūpa-mālyopayogādiṣu*). The record further stipulates: 'From now onwards our agents (*āyuktaka*) and temple servants (*deva-karmiṇaḥ*) who are engaged in performing the duties of *bali, caru* and *satra* rites and providing *gandha* etc. and all our partisans, kinsmen, police-magistrates, messengers, soldiers and royal heralds should endorse this grant.' In addition to other implications of the record which will be mentioned later, there are a few points which seem to be of immediate significance from the point of view of the study of the context to which the inscription relates. The Mothers collectively were 'Great Mothers' (*mahāmātaraḥ*),[10] much in the same way as the king was *mahārāja*, and there is thus a deliberate statement regarding the status that the Mothers, to whom royal patronage was being extended, were intended to represent. Second, the 'Great Mothers' are 'established'. This, again, reminds one of the parallel which Hermann Kulke draws between what he calls the 'new Hindu rājā' and the 'ever-present "new" Hindu god in the temple nearby'.[11]

The installation of the 'Great Mothers' required regular services, which in turn required resources which came from grants of land recorded in the Bagh plates. The regular services were of the form of *bali, caru* and *satra*, and of the offerings of *gandha, dhūpa* and *mālya*; the

convergence of the two elements in the ritual of worship of the 'installed Great Mothers' is religiously significant because they combine sacrifice (*bali, caru* and *satra* being three of the five great sacrifices, that is, *pañcamahāyajña*)[12] with what was essentially the ritual of the worship of the image. And the ritual of worship and the implicit cycle of services required the association, at the sacred space created, of *devakarmī, bhūtabhojaka*[13] and so on, in addition to support from a host of secular officials. 'Great Mothers', like sixty-four Yoginīs, collectively represented the Śakti at one level; there is substantial evidence, both in epigraphs and in literature, how strongly Śakti, the revelation of Divinity in female form, had begun to permeate the bhakti-based form of sectarian worship from the Gupta period onward.[14] Śakti, however, could be manifest in the unique cults of local goddesses, and a search for such cults takes us to another initially 'peripheral' area which, in this case, would be the Bundelkhand–Baghelkhand region of eastern Madhya Pradesh.

The region has yielded a number of Sanskrit inscriptions dating approximately from the Gupta period onward; I would like to cite first a record of AD 517;[15] the record may not be of much interest from the point of view of religion, but taken along with other records from the area, it too offers an idea of the social and religious transformation taking place in the region in this historical stage. Dated to the period of a king named Hastin and found at a place called Navagrāma, it records the grant of village Navagrāma to several Brāhmaṇas; the village is mentioned as having been located in *Pulindarājarāṣṭra*. This obviously is an extremely important example of a monarchical political formation emerging in the tribal region of the Pulindas. The next record, in chronological order, is the Khoh copperplate inscription of Mahārāja Saṃkṣobha of the Parivrājaka-Mahārāja family of rulers. Dated in 528–9, the record was found in the former Nagod state of Bundelkhand, now in the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh.[16] Saṃkṣobha was the ruler of Ḍabhālārājya which was located within eighteen forest kingdoms over which too he ruled (*sāṣṭāda-śāṭavirājyābhyantaraṃ Ḍabhālārājyaṃ*) and as a ruler his declared ideal was to keep himself engaged in the establishment of *varṇāśramadharma* (*varṇā-śrama-dharmasthāpanāniratena*). The inscription records that the king, at the request of Choḍugomin, gifted by a copperplate character (*tāmra-śāsanena*) half of the village of Opani, located in a territorial division called Maṇināgapeṭha to the goddess Piṣṭapurī whose temple was created by him (*bhagavatyāḥ Piṣṭapuryāḥ kāritaka-devakule*). The gift was made to ensure such services as *bali, caru and satra*—the sacrificial services which, as we have already seen, figure in the context of the

services of the 'Great Mothers' in the Bagh plate. The goddess Piṣṭapurī is most likely to be represented by the local deity Patainidevi, as suggested by A. Cunningham long ago,[17] despite J.F. Fleet's later assertion that the name should be taken to correspond to Piṣṭapura, a place located in Andhra.[18] In fact, Piṣṭapurī or Piṣṭapurikā as she is otherwise known, must have become, by the sixth century, quite a prominent deity in the Bundelkhand region. She is found to share a village, Dhavaṣaṇḍikā, which is made into a *devāgrahāra* (an *agrahāra* for gods), with a male deity (*Bhagavat*) in another Ḳhoh plate issued by Mahārāja Sarvanātha belonging to the family of Ucchakalpa-Mahārājas.[19] Half of the village was given by a copperplate charter to Choḍugomika, perhaps identical with Choḍugomi of the record of Saṃkṣobha, to be enjoyed by a succession of future generations of the donee. The record further stipulates: 'And it is agreed by him (and) by me, that it is granted for the purpose of repairs . . . of whatever may become broken or torn, belonging to the Bhagavatī Piṣṭapurikādevī and for the maintenance of *bali, caru and satra*.' The juxtaposition, in the context of a grant, of Bhagavat, the God, and of Bhagavatī Piṣṭapurikādevī, the female deity, is a religious motif which we shall come across in other records as well, but, for the moment, let me turn to a third set of Khoh copperplate inscriptions, also of Ucchakalpa-mahārāja Sarvanātha, dated AD 534.[20] This set of plates mention that two villages, Vyāghrapallikā and Kācarapallikā, also located in the territorial division of Maṇināgapeṭha, had previously been given as a mark of favour to one Pulindabhaṭa. Without pausing to ponder over the significance of the name Pulindabhaṭa (which obviously was derived from the tribal name Pulinda), one may proceed on to add that these villages were now granted by the king to one Kumārasvāmin, to be enjoyed by the succession of the latter's sons and sons' sons' for the purpose of worship of the divine goddess Piṣṭapurikādevī at the temple (*devakula*) which he had caused to be built at Mānapura (*tenāpi Mānapure kāritaka-devakule Bhagavatyāḥ Piṣṭapurikādevyāḥ pūjānimittam khaṇḍa-sphūṭita-pratisaṃskaraṇāya*). It would appear that the *devakula* of the deity constructed at Mānapura was different from the one mentioned in the copperplates of Parivrājaka ruler Saṃkṣobha; this would not only suggest that more than one newly formed royal family in a predominantly tribal area sought affiliation with the cult of Piṣṭapurī, but also that the domain of the deity expanded through creation of new temples or sacred centres associated with her.

Turning our attention now to western India, the record that I would like to cite first is the Samoli inscription of AD 646, from the Mewar area of

Rajasthan.[21] This, unlike the records cited so far, is not a record of gift from any royal family, but as I shall point out later, the text of the inscription does incorporate the royal context by using expressions which may be regarded as highly significant for analysing the religious contents of the record. The gift or the act of religious benefaction mentioned in the record is that a community of *mahājanas*, headed by a *pramukha mahattaka*, constructed a temple (*devakula*) of the goddess Araṇyavāsinī at a place called Araṇyakūpagiri. Literally, the deity Araṇyavāsinī is a 'resident of the forest', and although the record may not refer to the adoption of a forest deity by a mobile community of merchants, the name of the deity used in the context of what obviously was initially a forest region is distinct from Caṇḍikā[22] whose two feet are invoked in the beginning of the inscription by offering obeisance to them and who also is paired with Hara or Śiva. The record may thus make available to us another attempt at universalization of the local goddess, and, again, as in the case of the Khoh plate cited earlier, at juxtaposition of the God and the Goddess. As mentioned earlier, the invocation of the royal context is present in the text, and in this case is represented by the family of Guhila rulers who claimed Rajput status and later founded the state of Mewar.[23] The expression used with reference to the ruling monarch is significant: *deva-dvijagurujanānandī*, that is, 'one who gladdened the Gods, the brāhmaṇas and the preceptors'. This is another example, apart from the language of the record, which shows how what may be broadly considered as representative of Brāhmaṇical ideology was integral to religious transformation and in the making of the new monarchical order.

Another, almost contemporary record, of 644, also belongs to the time of the early Guhilas and comes from Dabok,[24] eight miles east of Udaipur in Mewar. The reference to the local ruling family, which held the area under one Dhavalappadeva, is made in this form: 'When Śrī Dhanika of the family of Guhilaputras was enjoying Dhavagartā', Dhavagartā being identical with Dhod in the Bhilwara district of Rajasthan. This record too is concerned with religious benefaction in the form of *akṣayanīvi* or fixed endowment, which constitutes what is called *devadāya* in the record. The endowment was made for two occasions: for the *devadroṇī*[25] of Mahādhideva Mahāmaheśvara instituted (*pratiṣṭhāpita*) by the donor Vaidya Giyaka and for another *devadroṇī*, created by a former Vaidya Yaśodeva, of Śrī Durgādevī who had the name Ghaṭṭavāsinī. Ghaṭṭavāsinī literally means a 'female deity of the pots', and the fact that the record states this to be another name of Durgā (*Ghaṭṭavāsinīnāmaśrī Durgādevyā*) substantiates what Anncharlott Eschmann characterized as the 'Śākta typology

of Hinduization'.[26] There are, besides, a few more points which the Dabok record offers for our consideration. One is that the *devadroṇī*, that is, the procession of Ghaṭṭavāsinī pre-dated the creation of the *devadroṇī* for Devādhideva Mahāmaheśvara; so the record points not only to 'universalization' by attributing the character of Durgā to the local deity Ghaṭṭavāsinī but also to the desired juxtaposition of the goddess with the appropriate god, who in this case had to be Śiva. Second, the grant made by the donor to the deities was intended for acquisition of merit for himself and his parents as it was also to provide resources to the deities in the form of incense and oil and other purposes (*guggula-dīpatailārthe khaṇḍasphuṭitasamāropaṇārthe*). Resources for *upacāras* and for repairs to the religious establishment are what would link the Dabok inscription with the late Gupta records from eastern Madhya Pradesh cited above.[27]

The last piece of documentary evidence that I would like to cite for this essay is dated a few centuries later, around the middle of the tenth century.[28] The evidence is available in a set of copperplate inscriptions from Partabgarh in south Rajasthan, issued between AD 942 and AD 946, in the time of Gurjara–Pratihāra ruler Mahendrapāla II. The plates which put together several religious grants made during the period record gifts made to, inter alia, a deity called Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī. One gift to the deity was a village which was given as a *śāsana* by the ruler in response to a request from an individual named Dhanaśūra; the village apparently was a part of the resource base of an official (*Talavaggika-Hariṣadabhujyamāna-Kharparapadraka-grāme*), but the king exercised his right to convert it into a *śāsana*. Another gift came in the form of contributions from the community of merchants, consisting of specified shares from different items of merchandise such as saffron, arecanut, etc. which, combined with other contributions like oil, foliage and flower were required for a special occasion, on the ninth day of the bright half of the month of Caitra, for the deity Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī. The broad spatial and social milieu within which the Partabgarh set of copperplates locate Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī, that is, the Yakṣiṇī of the Vaṭa (*Ficus Indica*) tree, is, to my understanding, highly pertinent to the theme of the present essay. The grants to the deity, the sources of which were heterogeneous, are a part of an extensive network of grants; here too, as a recipient of grants, the female deity Vaṭayakṣiṇīdevī is juxtaposed with a male deity who, in this case, is a deity called Indrādityadeva who too receives grants in the plates. The ingredients of worship, as reflected in the contributions made, are elaborate, and although elsewhere one comes across reference to the simple *vrata* ritual of Vaṭasāvitrī, or the deity Sāvitrı of the Vaṭa tree,[29] the impression one

gains is that in the context of a complex of religious establishments, the provisions for Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī must have been more elaborate. For example, the deity Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī was a part of a monastic establishment (*maṭha*) which the record mentions as Cāturvaidya Śrī Harīśeśvara-maṭha. It appears that the *maṭha* establishment which accommodated the shrine of Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī was headed by a *Caturvedī* Brāhmaṇa of Mandasor; further, the grant of a village as *śāsana* to the deity Vaṭayakṣiṇī was written by *purohita* Trivikramanātha. At another level, the society revealed to us by the set of copperplates from Partabgarh is one which is dominated by the king, his governors, subordinates and local officials who too all figure in a network of religious benefactions. From the manner in which she figures in the set of epigraphic texts, Śrīvaṭayaksiṇīdevī, like the goddesses mentioned before her, stands as an inextricable part of a complex social milieu and not at a distant religious plane alone.

III

In addition to the 'Great Mothers' and myriad other deities such as the 'Goddess of the Forest' (Araṇyavāsinī), 'Goddess of the Pot' (Ghaṭ-ṭavāsinī), 'Goddess of the Tree' (Vaṭayakṣiṇī), or elsewhere, the 'Goddess of the Post' (Stambheśvarī),[30] there were other goddesses in other regions and other points of time, mentioned in inscriptions, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to catalogue documentary evidence available on them. However, even the limited evidence presented above does seem to suggest that the ways through which different goddesses become visible in written records have to be considered in terms of the convergence of several interrelated historical phenomena. It is necessary to recognize these phenomena because while we notice the movement of certain cults from obscurity to their visibility in historical records, with changes that such a passage did entail, there must have been many other cults and cult centres which continued to remain outside recorded history. This change from invisibility to visibility, or, for that matter, within what may be considered the structure of the visible, must have been a continuing process in Indian religious history. The question which, however, has remained largely unasked is: what mediated the shift from invisibility to visibility; in other words, between *vana* and *kṣetra*; or *araṇya* and *janapada*; or between sign and icon? The earliest among the records cited above all emanated from new ruling families all of which emerged into history in what may have been peripheral areas of those times. Chronologically situated within the time-frame of the suzerain rule of the Gupta

monarchs, they nevertheless represented the appearance of local monarchies from somewhat unascertainable backgrounds. What however is common to them is that they use Sanskrit which, in any case, becomes a more important vehicle of official 'communication' than Prakrit from the Gupta period onward. And, as can be expected from the drafting of the records in Sanskrit, another element which is associated with the process of transformation to visibility of the goddess cults is the very prominent visibility of the Brāhmaṇas and their rituals.

What then is being posited here is essentially this. The appearance of the cults of goddesses in records from disparate geographical locations and at different points in time takes place mainly because of the linkage which is established between such cults and emerging monarchies through the mediation of the Brāhmaṇas and their rituals. I would like to consider this process broadly as 'Brāhmaṇical mode of cult appropriation'[31] for several reasons. First, the incorporation of a cult can be combined with what over time came to acquire the character of Brāhmaṇical rituals, and this would ensure that the basic character of a cult would undergo some inevitable change once the appropriation occurred, although the contents and scale of change must always have been historically specific. Two elements are crucial to this transformation, and they further suggest why appropriation has always to be selective appropriation since the introduction of these elements separates the original cult from what figures in the historical records. The first element is the shrine, and this is reflected in repeated references, some of which I have cited, to the construction of *devakula* where the deity could be established. The shrine could be small (*devakulikā*)[32] or it could be part of a larger complex like a *maṭha* (monastery),[33] but as elsewhere, the dimension of the shrine of an individual deity correlated with the scale of patronage available. The other key element is *upacāra* which is linked up with the provision of ritual services for a deity, installed and therefore requiring such services.

In fact, all these elements, in addition to such other rituals as the religious procession of a deity, are not unique either to the cult of the goddess or to Brāhmaṇical cults in general. They are present in the context of other religions as well. It is therefore necessary to explain why these elements are being taken here to construct a 'Brāhmaṇical mode'. One explanation of course is that in the empirical material analysed here, the evidence of Brāhmaṇical mediation is very noticeably present; any study of the general historical processes associated with the formation of Hinduism cannot thus escape looking into the specific temporal–spatial

context of the integration of the various elements that went into its making. However, what distinguishes the goddess in the context of Hinduism from her counterparts in Buddhism and Jainism is the 'feminine theology', and hence, the 'Brāhmaṇical mode'. To return to Ingalls, this is a theology that 'does not restrict feminine values in the world of the sacred by the strictures of subordination to which women were subject in the secular world'. The theology, however, is not monolithic; 'sometimes we seem to have the view of male monotheism modified only sufficiently to admit of a dual godhead. Sometimes, though, the Goddess may appear as mother, as beloved, as nature, as life, as the absolute.'[34] It is the wide range of identities of the goddess in the Brāhmaṇical feminine theology which makes the Brāhmaṇical mode of appropriation more expansive, although assimilation is not absent in other religious systems. For example, the assimilation of goddess cults in a Buddhist sacred centre like the *stūpa* of Bharhut in the same locality in which the local goddess Piṣṭapurikā figures in Sanskrit land grants of the late Gupta period is noticeable in the representations of such goddesses as Sirimā *devatā*, Culakokā *devatā* and Mahākokā *devatā*.[35] However, neither the numerous goddesses of the developed form of Mahāyāna Tantrik Buddhism nor the female divinities of the Jaina form of worship seem to represent a theology which projects the goddess as 'mother, as beloved, as nature, as life, as the absolute'. This projection makes Brāhmaṇical incorporation context-appropriate. In addition to the evidence cited above, which shows a local goddess as tree (nature), or in close proximity to a male divine, or transforms her through identification with the Śākta archetype, I would like to refer to a beautiful story relating to the famous temple of the deity Narasiṃha at Ahobila in Andhra Pradesh. In this story, a Chenchu tribal girl falls in love with Narasiṃha during his wanderings in the Nallamala forests; Narasiṃha could marry the girl only after the successful completion of the task, of the nature of hunting-gathering activities, set for him by the tribal chief. M.L.K. Murty, who narrates the story, writes:[36] 'The Chenchu girl, as the consort of Narasiṃha who became an incarnation of Viṣṇu, later became Chenchu Lakṣmī. There are excellent sculptural representations at the Ahobilam temple showing the Chenchu girl, wearing a leaf skirt and aiming her bow and arrow as a huntress; and the love episode in which the Chenchu girl is shown leaning on her bow as if a thorn were in her foot and Narasiṃha is shown as a tiny figure removing it. The Chenchus believe that Narasiṃha is their brother-in-law and have a special right to enter the temple at Ahobilam, which otherwise has become *purely Brāhmaṇical*' (emphasis added). The story is one among

many such 'mythopoeic oral traditions'; what it shows is that the heterogeneous composition of the Purāṇic pantheon as well as the Brāhmanical divine theology could reach out to a distant tribe and effect a two-way assimilation: that of Narasiṃha and Lakṣmī by the tribe and of the tribal chief's daughter of the traditional Chenchu lore in the sacred context of the Narasiṃha temple which 'has become highly Brāhmaṇical'.

The acceptance of the goddess in a situation characterized by 'male hierophanies' and the crystallization of a feminine theology were not, it must be noted, devoid of tension within what may be imperfectly understood as the parameters of Hinduism. The different versions of the medieval Bengali text *Manasāmaṅgala*[37] provide an excellent example of this tension in which Chānd Sadāgar, the patriarch of a merchant family and a Śiva worshipper, is reduced to the reluctant acceptance of the worship of serpent goddess Manasā through the awesome powers of vengeance of the persistent goddess. Closer to the time that we are dealing with in this essay is the text of Śūdraka's play *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, relevant references in which in Act I of the play deserve attention.[38] A reference to Mothers[39] occurs for the first time in the play when Cārudatta, the Brāhmaṇa hero who is stricken by poverty, announces to his friend Maitreya, the jester: 'Friend, I have made offerings to the deities of the hearth. Now, you go and make offerings to the Mothers at the crossroads [*kṛto mayā gṛhadevatābhyo bali, gaccha, tvam-api catuṣpathe mātṛbhyo balim-upahara*].' The jester refuses to go not only because of the futility of any more offerings to deities but also because of his apprehension of an unsavoury encounter with undesirable elements at the crossroads at that time of the evening. Unable to convince him Cārudatta asks him to wait and goes into meditation (*bhavatu tiṣṭha tāvat; ahaṃ samādhiṃ nirvartayāmi*). After a considerable lapse of time, within which the heroine of the play makes an unknowing and unnoticed entry into Cārudatta's house, Cārudatta again announces to Maitreya: 'Friend, I have completed *japa* (the prayers); now you go and make the offerings to the Mothers [*vayasya, samāpta-japosmi, tat sāmpratam gaccha, mātṛbhyo balim-upahara*].' The fact that Cārudatta's friend again refuses to go and offer the *bali* is attributed by Cārudatta to his own poverty; the text suggests otherwise. The friend finally gets persuaded but entreats that Radanikā, a female attendant at the household, goes with him. Cārudatta, when he expects the offerings to the Mothers to be made by his friend and confidante Maitreya, may be taken to consider this act of offering more casual than what the daily domestic rites demand. The Mother Goddesses were surely making their presence felt in the ritual

domain, but their recognition among the elites, despite their association with the crossroads, was, as *Mṛcchakaṭikam* suggests to us, still a slow process.

The idea of the 'Brāhmaṇical' mode of appropriation as the major mechanism through which myriad local cults and mythopoeic oral traditions get incorporated into Hinduism and in turn lend Hinduism its regional/local character leads us back to Eschmann's position on 'Hinduization' at the religious level and to Sontheimer's notion of 'continuum' as representing the wide spectrum of rituals, beliefs and speculative ideas which constitute the web of Hinduism. In explicating her position on the process of 'Hinduization of Tribal Deities' Eschmann stated her preference for 'Hinduization' to 'Aryanization' or 'Sanskritization' . . . 'in order to emphasize its general character. Hinduization may occur everywhere and without any direct impact from either Sanskrit or Aryans'.[40] However, in view of the evidence cited above as also the analysis Eschmann herself presents on the essential difference between 'Sign' and 'Icon', it becomes difficult to see how 'Hinduization' can be distanced from a larger process of social change in which the 'tribe' itself no longer remains a community accommodating superficial change but is very much caught up in a process of fundamental transformation in which the Brāhmaṇical presence looms large.[41] In the context of religious history, what needs particularly to be noted is the entry of the tribal or 'local' deity into the written record, into the vast and complex web of Hinduism. This entry, whether it is recorded in the form of a single epigraph which has survived, in the form of a purely local Purāṇa, or in the form of a written text of pan-Indian currency, is mediated through an idiom which is Brāhmaṇical, though not necessarily composed by a Brāhmaṇa. Second, the juxtaposition of sacrifice such as *pañcamahāyajña* with *upacāras*, whatever be the origin of the *upacāras*, in a complex of rituals in which sacrifice itself may have become *upacāra*, separates very fundamentally the 'Sign' from the 'Icon'. This separation takes place only in a religious world in which the Brāhmaṇa and his text are dominant elements.

Hinduism, as Sontheimer insisted, may indeed be understood as a continuum. In his view, taken as an appropriate example, the cult of Jagannātha 'combines the tribal world, the mythology of the Purāṇas, the Pañcarātra ritual', or, in other words, 'the nearly uninterrupted continuity from tribal beliefs to the highest philosophy'.[42] The idea of 'continuum' has been found to be so useful as to be relevant in such divergent contexts as: 'Tribe and Caste', 'Rural and Urban', 'Sign and Icon', '*Vana* and

Kṣetra'. Where does, then, the disjunction take place? What is the mechanism through which *Vana* passes into *Kṣetra*, or, to put it differently, the daughter of a Chenchu tribal chief is metamorphosed into Chenchu Lakṣmī? The answer has to be derived not from the goddess isolated from her historical context but by locating her within it. Since in the context of the formation of Hinduism the process of metamorphosis is dominated by the mediation of the Brāhmaṇa and his text, the reappearance, or rather the entry, of the goddesses into codified Hinduism, may also be taken to mark a disjunction between *Vana* and *Kṣetra* in which the textually structured, dominant *Kṣetra* element puts a new meaning into what could originate in the *Vana*.

Notes and References

1. It is necessary to stress this point because often, in attempts to comprehend Hinduism as a purely religio-philosophical system in unilinear terms, the diversity of its sources, particularly tribal roots, is bypassed. Note, for example, Madeleine Biardeau's statement: 'The religion that issued out of Vedic Revelation, having never had a centralized organization, became fragmented into major movements, and then into sects that are today difficult to enumerate,' *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*, translated by Richard Nice (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989), p. 159. This position on the heterogeneity within Hinduism is in consonance with Biardeau's other statement: 'If the Goddess—of whom the Vedic texts provide only pale sketches—takes on such importance, it is because "aboriginal", "Dravidian" cults centred on her force their way through and win for themselves a place in the most official Hinduism. But the cleavages are still intact and serve to structure Hindu society. What is "Aryan" is pure and is the norm, what is not is impure. A social hierarchy based on the sacred integrates the vanquished—the outsiders—at the bottom. Local folk beliefs are *irreconcilably opposed* to the pan-Indian beliefs advocated by the Brahmans, the cream of "Aryan" civilization' (emphasis added), ibid., p. 6. The notion of 'irreconcilably opposed' would simply not accept that despite their Vedic orthopraxy, the major bulk of beliefs and practices of Hinduism were of non-'Aryan' origin, necessitating regular redefinitions of the 'pure'.
2. Daniel H.H. Ingalls, 'Foreword', in C. Mackenzie Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology of India* (An Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purana) (Vermont, 1974), pp. xiv–xv.
3. See Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi, 1984).
4. G.D. Sontheimer, 'The *Vana* and the *Kṣetra*: The Tribal Background of Some Famous Cults', in G.C. Tripathi and Hermann Kulke, eds, *Religion*

and Society in Eastern India (Eschmann Memorial Lectures) (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 117–64; also idem., *Pastoral Deities in Western India* (translated from the original German by Anne Feldhaus) (Oxford University Press, New York, 1989), passim.

5. See B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990), Introduction.
6. Anncharlott Eschmann, 'Sign and Icon: Symbolism in the Indian Folk Religion', in G.C. Tripathi and Hermann Kulke, eds, *Religion and Society in Eastern India*, pp. 211–36.
7. Eschmann, 'Sign and Icon', pp. 213–14.
8. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Introduction: The Making of Early Medieval India', in *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994), pp. 1–37.
9. K.V. Ramesh and S.P. Tewari, *A Copperplate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh* (Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1990), pp. 4–6.
10. 'The Great Mothers' would, again, imply contrast with the 'Little Mothers' (*māṭṛkās*) whose cult assumed considerable importance gradually. See 'The Seven Little Mothers', Appendix A in Coburn, op. cit. However, the term *mahāmaṭṛkā*, referring to the group of Kārttikeya's mothers, is also found. See David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Vision of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Delhi, 1987), ch. 10; also see M. Rahman, *Māṭṛkā* (in Bengali) (Dacca, 1989).
11. H. Kulke, 'The Early and the Imperial Kingdom in Early Medieval India' (in press).
12. See P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law), vol. 2, part 1 (2nd edition, Poona, 1974), pp. 696–704, for a discussion of *pañcamahāyajñas*, although the terminology used is somewhat different.
13. The term *bhūtabhojaka* is intriguing. Literally meaning 'feeder of the *bhūta/s*' (assuming that the intended expression is *bhojpaka*) it does not seem to suggest anything specific to the editors of the record. There may not be any correlation at all, but the term does remind me that in my remote village in Burdwan district in West Bengal, there indeed was provision for the feeding of the *bhūtas* on the dark night of the worship of goddess Kālī—in the shrubs, a little away from the shrine.
14. For a historical survey, see J.N. Tiwari, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1985), chs. 1 and 2.
15. K.N. Dikshit, 'Navagrāma Grant of the Maharaja Hastin (G.E. [1] 98)', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 21 (reprinted by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1984), pp. 124–6.
16. J.F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and their Successors* (reprinted by Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1970), pp. 112–16.

17. Alexander Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in the Central Provinces in 1873–74 and 1874–75* (vol. 9) (Calcutta, 1879), pp. 31–3. The following is Cunningham's description of the temple of Patainidevi: 'Eight miles to the north of Uchahara and 4 miles to the east of Pithaora, the temple of Pataini Devi forms a conspicuous object in the treeless landscape, standing out boldly on a low projecting spur of the lofty hill whose quarries furnished the stones of the Bharhut sculptures. The temple itself is a very small one . . . but it is remarkable for its massive stones, and more particularly for its flat roof, which is formed of a single slab, . . . after the manner of the early Gupta temple.'
18. For Fleet's views, see op. cit., p. 113, fn 2.
19. J.F. Fleet, op. cit., pp. 121–5.
20. Ibid., pp. 135–8.
21. R.R. Halder, 'Samoli Inscription of the Time of Siladitya: [Vikrama-Samvat] 703', *Epigraphia Indica* vol. 20 (reprinted by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1983), pp. 97–9.
22. The Araṇyavāsinī, however, is also Caṇḍikā. See Sukumar Sen, ed. *Caṇḍīmaṅgala* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1975). *Caṇḍīmaṅgala*, a medieval Bengali text, juxtaposes the goddess of the forest with her other forms on other spatial-cultural contexts.
23. See Nandini Sinha, 'A Study of State and Cult: The Guhilas, Pāśupatas and Ekaliṅgaji in Mewar, Seventh to Fifteen Centuries AD', *Studies in History*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1993), pp. 161–82.
24. R.R. Halder, 'Dabok Inscription of the Time of Dhavalappadeva: [Harsha-] Samvat 207', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 20, pp. 122–5. For the revised date of the record, see D.C. Sircar, 'Date of Dabok Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica* vol. 35, pt. 2 (Delhi, 1963), pp. 100–2.
25. *Devadroṇī*, according to M. Monier-Williams, is 'an idol procession', *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (reprinted, Delhi, 1986), p. 493.
26. A. Eschmann, *et al.*, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 79–98.
27. J.F. Fleet, op. cit., pp. 135–8.
28. G.H. Ojha, 'Partabgarh Inscription of the Time of [the Pratihara] King Mahendra-Pala II, of Mahodaya: Samvat 1003', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 14 (reprinted by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1982), pp. 176–88.
29. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, pp. 223–32.
30. The nature of the transformation of the wooden post, which is an object of worship among the Khond tribals of Orissa, into a female deity who also became a cult deity of several ruling families of Orissa has been discussed by Eschmann, 'Sign and Icon'; also *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, passim. It seems that the 'post' could also become a male deity. The personal name Stambheśvaradāsa, literally, 'slave of the Lord of the post' occurs in the Dhanaidaha copperplate of year 113 of the time of the Gupta ruler Kumāragupta I, see D.C. Sircar, 'Dhanaidaha

Copperplate Inscription [of the time of Kumaragupta I]–Gupta year 113 (= AD 432–33)', in *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I (2nd edition, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1965), pp. 287–9.

31. It may be clarified that 'appropriation' is not unique either to Brāhmaṇism or in relation to cults of goddesses alone. For a fascinating study of different patterns and phases of appropriation of the Kataragama centre in Sri Lanka, see Gananath Obeysekere, 'Myth and Political Legitimization at the Sacred Centre in Kataragama, Sri Lanka', in Hans Bakker, ed., *The Sacred Centre as the Focus of Political Interest* (Groningen, 1992), pp. 219–33.
32. For example, reference to a *devakulikā* (small shrine) of a goddess called Kādambarī, located on the periphery of a village, occurs in the Khalimpur plate of the time of Pāla king Dharmapāla, F. Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapaladeva', *Epigraphia India*, vol. 4 (reprinted by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1979), pp. 243–54.
33. See note 28.
34. Ingalls, op. cit.
35. H. Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 2, pt. 2), revised by E. Waldschmidt and M.A. Mehendale (Ootacamund, 1963), pp. 78, 80–1.
36. M.L.K. Murty, 'Ethnoarchaeology of the Kurnool Cave Areas, South India', *World Archaeology*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1985), 192–205.
37. B.B. Bhattacharyya, ed., *Manasāmaṅgala* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1977). The reluctant acceptance of the goddess as an object of worship is also the theme of *Caṇḍīmaṅgala*, see Sukumar Sen, op. cit. It may be considered an interesting coincidence that *ghaṭa* or the pot is associated with both Caṇḍikā and Manasā. In *Caṇḍīmaṅgala*, the hero of the poem passes through a series of calamities which he inflicted upon himself by kicking the pot which was the representation of the goddess being worshipped by one of his wives, Sukumar Sen, op. cit. For the pot of Manasā, the serpent goddess, see Asutosh Bhattacharyya, *Bāiś Kavir Manasā-Maṅgal Bā Bāiśā* (in Bengali) (Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1962), Introduction.
38. The text of *Mṛcchakaṭikam* by Śūdraka used here is to be found in the series *Saṃskṛta-Sāhitya-Sambhāra* (in Bengali), vol. 7, 2nd print (Calcutta, 1986), edited by J.B. Chaki, *et al.*, pp. 357–494.
39. For D.D. Kosambi's fascinating analysis of the evidence of *Mṛcchakaṭikam* and other literary references to the Mothers and of the significance of the crossroads, see 'At the Crossroads: A Study of Mother-Goddess Cult Sites', *Myth and Reality* (Bombay, 1983), pp. 82–109.
40. A. Eschmann, *et al.*, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, p. 79.
41. Even in a predominantly tribal context, the Brāhmaṇa can intervene through his physical presence and ritual. Referring to the festival of the worship of the wooden post among the Khond tribals of Orissa, Eschmann writes: 'In

some Khond villages a Brahmin is brought from a considerable distance on the last day of this festival. Just before it is displayed, the Brahmin whispers the "life-giving" *mantra* to the cut and ready post. With this he performs the act which constitutes the first consecration of a Hindu icon: the "breathing in of life" by the whispering of a *mantra*,' 'Sign and Icon', p. 220.

42. G.D. Sontheimer, 'The *Vana* and *Kṣetra*', pp. 117–18.

CHAPTER 10

Other, or the Others? Varieties of Difference in Indian Society at the Turn of the First Millennium and Their Historiographical Implications*

Two points of clarification would be in order as a prelude to this essay. First, the availability of written records and historical sources of other kinds which can be firmly dated at 1000 is notoriously uncertain in India. Even epigraphical records of this time, which do bear dependable dates and are available in relative abundance, do not relate to what we may be looking for, whereas epigraphs, slightly removed in date, may. The world that we shall seek to reconstruct will therefore lack precise chronological limits and will only be approximate. This, in a sense, is somewhat immaterial because, as we shall try to demonstrate, formation of social attitudes is neither unequivocal at a particular point of time nor does it follow a fixed deadline.

The second point which is more relevant here for the purpose of the material that we shall present pertains to the sense in which we consider the issue of the 'other'. Pursuing historiography, it appears that although discourses on the 'other' may continue to move through unceasing rounds of debate, in narratives on Indian history we tend to continue with fixities. Narratives which deal with the Indian world of 1000, whatever the sources of their ideological location, seem to regard this period in relation to India as a watershed, and, further, all such narratives seem to be infused with a fixed notion of the 'other'. I would like to give one example, in the words of one responsible for a much-used multi-volume nationalist history project:

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> In the fateful year AD 997 Abu-l-Qasim Mahmud, son of Sabuktigin, captured Gazni, developed a marvellous striking power and turned his attention to India.
>
> Ancient India ended. Medieval India began.[1]

The sense in which the 'other' is taken in this notion of a new beginning, marking the 'end' of ancient India, stems from the perception of a type of political hegemonization where the religious identity of the hegemonic power is the index, combined with its capacity to politically hegemonize, of otherness. This religious identity is further perceived as a source of intolerance and of acts of vandalism, and 'otherness' therefore implies a measure of difference which can be comprehended only in terms of binary polarity charged with animosity and violence. Although, as I shall try to demonstrate by citing examples from the period under review, acts of religious vandalism could have varied contexts, including making of political statements, this particular identity of the new rulers was what informed the historiography of the period from the colonial period onward. The 'otherness' that this historiography has succeeded in establishing is—and this is the point I am seeking to make—in a major sense distinct from the otherness which pre-colonial history-writing associated with the establishment of Muslim rule in India.[2] The construct of the 'other' in this historiography is that of the 'big other' or the Other *par excellence*;[3] the differences that inhere the structure of any history get marginalized in this construct. It is true that the sharp edges of this big otherness get toned down in historical writings which focus on movements towards synthesis;[4] sometimes, the technological, economic and administrative effects of the coming of the Muslim Turks and of the establishment of the Sultanate, rather than simple political hegemonization of the Muslims, are highlighted to mark the advent of the medieval period of India.[5] Both only somewhat dilute the religious underpinnings of the construction of the 'other'; they do not raise the necessity of reassessing the image of the homogeneous Muslims as the big other in the Indian social and mental world of 1000, or, in other words, questioning whether the 'other' in the context of India of 1000 needs to keep on leaning on the 'religious' of current historiography for elucidation of cultural or ethnic differences.

I. Preparing the Problematic

In order to prepare the space for the argument which I shall try to develop in this essay, I start with two quotes from two different texts, both later in date than the beginning of the second millennium but very much

relevant to the ways in which the construction of the other can be reviewed.

a. Inside the temple,
Wherever they turned,
They saw king's men with drawn swords
hacking away at animals, plunging
their sharp steel into warm
quivering flesh. Deep gashes
opened, red blood flowed in spurts,
and heads sank. Tongues were ripped off,
the blood-dripping sockets of eyes were held
impaled at the steel's edge. Limbs
were torn asunder, chopped and minced,
and piled in a corner. And
with the blood-reek steaming, they baked rice.
They decked the shrine with festoons
made of tripe and the sheep's gut—
which looked like bird-scares
in maize-fields of sin.
The children who were to take
their turn saw all the ritual,
the orgy of blood-lust set
at the feet of Māri. The victims
that waited along with them,
the hen, sheep, goat, and the buffalo,
mingled their cries, bleat, bellow
and all in terrible suppliance.
The earth shook with the echo of their yells.
The precinct walls with palings were hung
with strings of wreathed skulls, and
the whole thing looked as if Māri herself
was presiding over the scene of
carnage, looking through her million
bony faces, with devouring hunger
in her eyes.[6]

b. I very much lament for what has happened to the groves in Madhura. The coconut trees have all been cut and in their place are to be seen rows of iron spikes with human skulls dangling at the points.

In the highways which were once charming with the sounds of anklets of beautiful women, are now heard ear-piercing noises of Brāhmins being dragged, bound in iron-fetters.

. . . .

> The waters of Tāmbraparṇi which were once white with sandal paste rubbed away from the breasts of charming girls are now flowing red with the blood of cows slaughtered by the miscreants.
>
> Earth is no longer the producer of wealth. Nor does Indra give timely rains. The God of death takes his undue toll of what are left [of] lives if undestroyed by the Yavanas. I am very much distressed by looking at the fearful faces of the Drāviḍas, their lips parched by hot sighs, and their hair worn in utter disorder.
>
> The Kali age now deserves deepest congratulations for being at the zenith of its power; for, gone is sacred learning; hidden is refinement; hushed is the voice of Dharma; destroyed is discipline, and discounted is nobility of birth.[7]

The first quote is from a Jaina Kannada text written in early thirteenth century by Janna, the chief court poet of the Hoysala ruler of his time in south Karnataka. The gory description of killing and sacrifice for goddess Māri sought to be propitiated by the king who himself can be and is described as a Deputy of the Lord of Death, is a counter-image of totally violence-less tranquillity of the Jaina faith. In the text, which like many other Jaina texts produced by profound Jaina scholarship of the early medieval period is something like a text of proselytization; violence, like false doctrine, marks non-Jaina form of worship, such as worship of goddess Māri. The king, so long as he is a worshipper of the goddess is a 'Deputy of the Lord of Death'; he can obtain redemption and his true dharma only if he takes to the path enunciated by the Tīrthaṅkaras. From the perspective of the Jaina doctrine, the goddess Māri, who can be propitiated only through the performance of bloody sacrifices, represents the religious other, despite the presence of hosts of *devīs* in the Jaina pantheon. The second quote, from *Madhurā-Vijayam*, a Sanskrit text of the fourteenth century, is a eulogy of a Vijayanagara prince by his wife. The prince undertook a host of campaigns against other rulers of south India which climaxed in the defeat of the Muslim (Yavana) ruler of Madura in south Tamilnadu and brought the rule of the sultans there to an end. The text describes, in no uncertain terms, the acts of depredation of the Muslim rulers: the desecrations of temples, the humiliations of Brāhmaṇas and the ruin of their habitats, the killings—all acts of violence destabilizing the social order. The restoration of the social order—of dharma—had to be brought about by displacing the Yavanas, a feat which, in the text, necessitated divine intervention.

It is not being argued that the 'otherness' suggested by the two texts—one in a peninsular vernacular language and the other in the more

universal but exclusive Sanskrit (but written in the same region) is comparable. What can be suggested is that to those who held out Jaina doctrines as a sure recipe for cure from evils of the violence of Māri worship, the worship of the goddess represented an 'other'. Escape from it was not only essential; it was possible only through recourse to and practise of the non-violent Jaina doctrine. The 'Yavana' other of the text of *Madhurā-Vijayam* was 'other' of a different order; ethnically perceived, the Yavana was different from 'Tāmila' (an inhabitant of the Tamil country) or Karṇāṭa (an inhabitant of Karnataka); he was linguistically different because, according to the text, when parrots were being made to learn his speech:

> Screechings of owls in worn-out pleasure groves do not afflict me so much as the voice of parrots taught to speak Persian in the houses of Yavanas. . . .[8]

These, of course, only added to the negative quality of the Yavana as the religious other.

As a starting point of a discussion on self-perception and perception of social entities outside the parameter of what may have been considered as 'self', the texts cited above perhaps justify a position which would argue for 'others' rather than the 'other'. In 'other' the 'otherness' is the opposite of 'self' and, therefore, otherness implies a single dimension of a mutually hostile relationship. The use of 'others', on the other hand, opens up the possibility of viewing the components of a culture and society in terms of polygonal relationships and therefore of many identities. The many identities, implying varieties of difference rather than 'big otherness' have space for confrontation as well, but at the same time, of varieties of negotiation. What I shall seek to do in the following sections is to elucidate this position, in favour of the existence of a multiplicity of identities—and therefore of 'othernesses'—by referring to evidence from the past, as representing signification of a different order than the construction generally in vogue.

II. Heterogeneity of the 'Self'

How does one comprehend how 'self' was conceived within the physical space of the Indian subcontinent around 1000? Obviously, the conception of the 'self', whatever may be considered as its constituent elements, is a conception which texts (because of the non-availability of other perceptions) may have self-consciously projected, or which we, in our search for identities in the world of 1000, are able to locate in the texts.

Only, one must be careful that texts used are of different varieties, representing different spatial units and viewpoints. Underlining one type of source or viewpoint would inevitably end up by constructing a one-dimensional 'self'.

Relevant texts of around 1000 carry over, from earlier centuries, a concept of the country, which can be considered to be a key element in how the text-writers perceived themselves as a part of the country they inhabited. The country, called either Jambudvīpa or Bhāratavarṣa (sometimes with identical connotations and sometimes with Bhāratavarsa being only a part of Jambudvīpa) was an integral part of an elaborate cosmography. Jambudvīpa was the country over which the emperor Aśoka ruled in the third century BC. Bhāratavarṣa was conceived in the Purāṇas, in territorial terms, as the country which lay to the north of the ocean (*samudra*) and to the south of the snow-clad mountains (*Himavat*); the inhabitants of the country were Bhāratī, the descendants of Bharata.[9] Geographically, the *varṣa* (a unit in the cosmographic scheme) of Bhārata corresponded to the Indian subcontinent, and, at the same time, spatially and ethnographically, it was composed of a number of segments. The segments, ranging from five to nine, were conceived with reference to a central zone (*madhyadeśa*), all the constituent segments containing a number of ethnic–demographic *janapada* units each. This is a schema which came to be elaborated in texts of different periods, but with significant inputs of their own. Let me take up one Sanskrit text of northern India, *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, written by the famous litterateur Rājaśekhara (*c.* 880–920) who probably came from Maharashtra in western India but was associated with royal courts of both northern and central India.[10] *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* ('Discourse on Poetry') follows earlier texts in conceiving the country in cosmographical terms: the country (*deśa*) is both the universe (*jagat*) as well as a part of the universe. The earth, a part of the universe, consists of seven islands with Jambudvīpa at the centre, and Jambudvīpa comprises Bhāratavarṣa which, in turn, consists of various countries, mountain ranges, and rivers, corresponding to the northern, eastern, southern and western parts of India.

Rājaśekhara's preference, as a representative of the Brāhmaṇized elite, was for Āryāvarta, the region lying between the western and eastern oceans and between the Himālayas and the Vindhyas. Āryāvarta, roughly corresponding to northern India, was conceived as the land where 'the ideal social norms based on varṇa and *āśrama* prevailed'; generally, the styles and conventions followed by poets were what were derived from Āryāvarta. The centrality of Āryāvarta in the Brāhmaṇical

scheme of things, however, does not prevent Rājaśekhara from describing the components of the other regions meticulously. Take, for example, his description of Uttarāpatha, the region of the north: 'Uttarāpatha is beyond Pṛthūdaka [Pehoa in Haryana state]. There the countries (*janapada*) are Śaka, Kekaya, Vokkāṇa, Hūṇa, Vāṇāyuja, Kamboja, Vahlīka, Valhava, Limpāka, Kulūta, Kīra, Taṅgana, Tuṣāra, Turuṣka, Barbara, Harahurava, Huhuka, Sahuḍa, Haṃsamārga, Ramaṭha, Karakaṇṭha and others.'[11] Consisting of ethnic groups of the past as well as of the present, the list which includes the Śakas, Turuṣkas and others of West Asian and Central Asian origin makes Rājaśekhara's divisions of the country (*deśa-vibhāga*) a schema which cannot strictly conform to India of the subcontinent; one has to locate this tenth-century schema within an earlier cosmographical convention. Within this convention, Āryāvarta, like Madhyadeśa, is not simply a geographical region. It connotes a social order, and the currency of that social order, defined by adherence to *varṇāśramadharma*, may expand the limits of Āryāvarta into other regions.[12]

'Self' and its 'other', in the sense they are carried over in textual perceptions of the world of 1000, thus do not have space for 'insider' and 'outsider', simply territorially demarcated. Neither Rājaśekhara, nor others who articulated their notion of the country and its culture in later centuries, suggested homogeneity. To the composers of Sanskrit inscriptions in the Andhra country in the first half of the fourteenth century, their own country—identified as Tiliṅga—could be described in the following terms:

> . . . at first the whole world was submerged under waters; that on perceiving this, the god Nārāyaṇa, assuming the form of Brahmā, created all the worlds, in the midst of which was the earth adorned by the Golden Mountain and surrounded by the islands and the seas; that in the centre of the earth and encircled by the salt seas was the Jambudvīpa divided into nine *khaṇḍas* or continents, of which that extending from the Himālayas to the southern ocean was known as Bhāratavarṣa comprising many countries, where different languages and customs prevailed; and that one of them named Tiliṅga, through which flowed many holy rivers, contained several rich towns and cities, beautiful mountains, impenetrable forests, deep tanks, and unassailable fortresses.[13]

Heterogeneity which then characterizes definition of the 'self' is elucidated by Rājaśekhara's underpinning of what cultural differences were. His seventh chapter dwells, among other things, on styles of speech, a major marker in contemporary culture, in view of the process

of the emergence of the vernaculars in the period:[14] '. . . the Sanskrit articulation of the inhabitants of Magadha and other countries to the east of Vārāṇasī is good, but they are inexperienced in uttering Prākṛit . . . . Let the inhabitants of the Gauḍa country give up reciting *gāthā* or let Sarasvatī, the presiding deity of words (*śabda*), take birth in another form . . . the inhabitants of the Lāṭa country are hostile towards Sanskrit (*saṃskṛta-dviṣaḥ*) and read Prākṛit . . .'[15] The speech habits of the inhabitants of different *janapadas* were as varied as beliefs in doctrines and ideas which, according to Rājaśekhara, could find their reflections in literary compositions themselves. He cites examples of how the doctrines of Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Bauddha, Lokāyatika, and Jaina could produce different literary articulations, often giving expression to antagonisms implicit in adherence to different ideas (cf. the antagonism present in the following sentence used as an illustration of literary composition: 'Even when chased by an elephant do not enter a Jaina temple to save your life', *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, VIII).

The heterogeneity within the 'self', for which the tenth-century text *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* is a random sample, could be a source of potential and actual tension between the components constituting that society. I focus on actual conflicts in two spheres: (i) conflicts over political supremacy, and (ii) conflicts over the assertion of doctrinal and sectarian supremacy.

In the Indian world of 1000, political hegemony was both a matter of ideology as well as material gain. The *caritas* or political 'biographies' of rulers underline how important it was for them to subjugate their adversaries; this alone could ensure their status as the sovereign ruler.[16] Inscriptions too enumerate, by using a mixture of metaphors, the adversaries in terms of the countries over which they ruled. The countries could be in a segment of the Bhāratavarṣa of Rājaśekhara's description; they could be beyond the segments, and the actual military expeditions, in addition to their symbolic values, were real in terms of both intent and the devastations they could cause. The conquest by the Tamilnadu Colas of Śrī Laṅkā (the country of Ilam)[17] could have wreaked havoc of the same order as the Colas ravaging the neighbouring state of the Cālukyas of Karnataka. Let us hear what the victim, and later the victor, Cālukya King Satyāśraya, says in an inscription of 1007–8 from the Dharwad district of Karnataka:

> . . . when Rājarāja Nityavinoda Rājendra Vidyādhara, ornament of the Choḷa race, Nūrmaḍi-Choḷa, came accompanied by a host of nine hundred thousand (men), halted at Donavure, and was ravaging the whole country, perpetuating murders of women, children, and Brāhmaṇas, seizing women, and overthrowing the order of caste,—[18]

The Cola and Cālukya rulers were obviously not engaged in a symbolic act of spurring for attaining 'sovereign' status; their political animosity, that is, of 'otherness', which could degenerate to the level of total turmoil of the established social order (*jāti-nāśa*), revived similar bloody and prolonged encounters between earlier Cālukyas of Badami in Karnataka and Pallavas of Kāñcī.[19] Contestation for political supremacy is a field which engages a number of players, the battlelines in which need to be painted in several colours rather than a single one. To quote from a *Carita* (political 'biography') text eulogizing the achievements of a Karnataka ruler Vikramāditya VI (1076–1126), who alone could emulate the heroic deeds of the legendary Vikramāditya:

> The ocean, filled with a circle of bloodstreams arising from destruction of the forces of the Colas, appeared to be red like the vermilion on the frontal globes of his elephants.
>
> . . .
>
> He, the mighty hero, having held his bow in victorious undertakings, the faces of the women of Draviḍa became extremely grey by their excessively hot breath.
>
> . . .
>
> Out of temptation for a kingdom great with one umbrella he snapped into a hundred pieces the numerous sticks of kings of high lineage, as if to prevent other umbrellas.
>
> . . . who in battles, captured the elephant of victory of the king of Gauḍa and uprooted the great power of the King of Kāmarūpa.
>
> By him the sea, polluted by the blood of the King of Kerala, was made to shun fear from the sage Agastya.
>
> Out of fear from him the King of the island of Ceylon, being a refugee, rested in the hermitage of the sage who was the husband of Lopāmudrā.[20]

Another 'otherness' which is equally aggressive—and perhaps socially more pervasive—can be seen, again, in the multipronged contestations for propounding one's own doctrinal and sectarian superiority over others, the articulation of the claimed superiority being linked with the context of patronage which had its locus in institutions with their specific denominations. An excellent dramatic expression of the world of sectarian doctrinal difference—the kind of difference which is present in Rāja-śekhara's discourse on poetry as well—is the allegorical Sanskrit play *Prabodhacandrodaya*,[21] written some time between 1042 and 1098, by Kṛṣṇa Miśra, associated with the Candella court of central India. Represented as an ascetic of the *haṃsa* (duck) order of the Advaita school,

Kṛṣṇa Miśra is said to have written his play for teaching the Advaita doctrine through the allegory of the fight between the evil and the virtuous, in the 'Rise of the Moon of (spiritual) Awakening (*Prabodhacandrodaya*)'. All the attributes of evil, in the play, such as *krodha* (anger), *pāruṣya* (harshness), *lobha* (greed), *anṛta* (falsehood), *mātsarya* (spite) are associated with groups which do not accept the authority of the Vedas. These groups—the Cārvākas, the Saugatas or the Buddhists and others are either destroyed or flee from a battle which is a battle between good and evil, between truth and untruth. The Saugatas flee to the Sindhu, Gandhāra, Pārasika, Magadha, Andhra, Hūṇa, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga, some of which were considered as impure in early *dharmaśāstric* texts; the refuge of the Digambaras and the Kāpālikas was Pañcāla, Mālava and Ābhīra, both core and marginal in terms of locational status, but they had to live hidden among the illiterate.

Allegory was but one way of expressing the acute sensitivity of genuine and violent opposition to what was seen as different and inferior. If in Vajrayāna Buddhism of eastern India, Buddhist divinities could trample upon Purāṇic Hindu deities,[22] the sword of *syādvāda*, the doctrine of the Jainas, was a sure weapon which could any time fell the frail and false logic of the Bauddhas.[23] An aggressive Śaiva order, with its devotees prepared to go to the length of cutting off their heads to demonstrate the superiority of their order, simply reveals another face of the heterogeneous universe of doctrinal incompatibilities which come through in firm statements in documents which various sacred centres, in asserting their indisputable supremacy and claim to exclusive patronage, generated. I cite one sample of about 1200 from Ablur in Dharwad district of Karnataka:

> And when, on the god Somanātha having thus given his commands, Ekāntada Rāmayya was abiding, with complete indifference to other things, at the shrine of the god Brahmeśvara at Abbalūru, some of the Jainas, together with that Saṅkagauṇḍa ['one of the village headmen of that place'], concerted together, and came to obstruct him, and with great resoluteness persistently sang the praises (of their own god) in the proximity of Śiva, saying 'Jina is the (true) divinity'. When he heard that Ekāntada Rāmayya became very full of wrath, and said 'It is forbidden to praise any other deity in the proximity of Śiva'; but refusing to desist, they continued vociferating; and then he spoke thus: 'who is it that creates the earth? who is it that protects it in the time of calamity? and further, who is it that is able to destroy it, when his anger becomes great?: it is that same Śambhu; and, in the face of the existence of him, who pervades everything, how can he (Jina) be a god, who came by chance into the world, and lived in bewilderment, and applied himself to practising austerity, and (only thus) attained happiness?: does your *Arhat* bestow gifts

as Hara (Śiva) does?; has he ever given even ever so small a thing?; (it is) from Hara (that) in former days the devout *Gaṇas* Bāṇa and Diniśāḷa, and so many others obtained boons.' On his having thus spoken, the Jains said—'It may be so!; but why dost thou simply talk of former worthies?; cut off thine own head, under such conditions that all people may know of it, and offer it to him, and get it back from him (and then we will admit that) thou art indeed a pious man and he is indeed the god.'

When they had thus spoken, Ekāntada Rāma said 'If I offer my head to (Śiva) the foe of love, and obtain it back, what is the wager that ye will pay to me?' Whereupon they replied in anger, 'we will pluck up our Jina and set up (an image of) Śiva.' Then, saying 'Give me (it in writing on) a palmyra-leaf'; and taking the palmyra-leaf that they gave, Rāma brought (his image of) Śiva into the presence of the Jains at the place where he was to straightway cut off his head and make an offering of it, and spoke thus: 'If I have ever not said that thou alone, O Śambhu! art my protection without fail, and if my thoughts have ever gone astray after other gods, my head shall not go from me by the edge of this scimitar; but, otherwise, O Śiva, let it roll down before thy feet': and, thus speaking, the brave Rāma with a loud shout, and with an unfaltering hand, set himself to cut off his head and lay it at the feet of Śiva.

. . .

After the severed head had been exhibited in public during seven days, Hara kindly gave it back; the head became sound again without any scar; and Rāma received it back, to the knowledge of all people. In much perturbation, all the Jains, in great distress, bowed down on the ground and seized his feet, imploring him to abstain from destroying their Jina; but, refusing to abstain, he fell on it like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, and broke the head of the Jina. Just as a wild elephant in rut plunges into a grove of plantain trees, and, though alone, sweeps away everything before him, so he, putting forth his strength, scattered forth the heroes who guarded it, and the horses, and the chieftains, and while the opposing ranks of the Jains, crying out that Māri . . . had come upon them, were running away in fright, he beat the Jina till it fell; and there he made them accept the holy Vīra-Someśa.[24]

For the devotee of Śiva, presented in the document as being born and reborn through Śiva's divine intervention as a saviour of the 'congregation (of Śaivas on the earth) . . . afflicted among the Jains and Buddhists', breaking the Jina was the desired vindication and assertion of his faith.

III. Heterogeneity and Evidence Regarding the 'Big Other'

The evidence presented above, of heterogeneity and difference, does not normally figure in Indian historical narratives. The 'big other' of conventional historiography being the Muslim intruder with a culture so

wholly different that it can be presented only in terms of binary difference, it is time now to turn to a consideration of how the Muslims and Islam are perceived in the Indian sources in the centuries around 1000. I shall return to historiography in the last section of this essay, but it may be mentioned here that the way references are made to the Muslims and Islam in non-Arabic and non-Persian sources written in India has not generally been analysed, for the purpose of their integration into historical narratives, to examine: (i) whether different communities professing Islam are perceived in them as a homogeneous Muslim community, (ii) whether the perception of communities professing the Islamic faith changed over centuries in such sources, (iii) in what different ways notions and sites of Islamic worship could be represented in such sources. These queries seem to be an inevitable response to the evidence cited above: if the construction of a homogeneous 'self' is not possible, and if the language of contestation, dissent and even violence is often a visible connecting thread between different components of the structure, then is it logically possible to construct a homogeneous 'other' which is the counter-image of that elusive homogeneous 'self'?

Indian sources refer to those who may be considered to constitute the category 'Muslim' from as early as the eighth century. The point to note in these references is that those referred to are not Muslims but the ethnic communities of which they were members.[25] When they were mentioned as violent raiders, as often the eighth-century–tenth-century Tājikas or Arabs were, they were vile and were against the Brāhmaṇas and gods, the two pillars on which the social fabric rested. The Tājikas or the Arabs and the Turuṣkas or the Turks were therefore enemies. The implication of this enmity, of this 'otherness', is of one kind. At the same time, the Tājika, or the Pārasika or the Turuṣka, when he entered the arena of political contestation along with other contemporary rulers, he was one of the adversaries who had to be subjugated—a *leit motif* which characterized the records of the rulers of perhaps all parts of India of the period around 1000. To cite one record from western India, this is how the Deccanese Rāṣṭrakūṭa King Kṛṣṇa III (939–67) is lauded for his victories over other rulers.

> Whose lotus-feet are constantly bowed to by (the rulers of) Pāṇḍya, Oḍra, Siṃhala, Cola, Pārasika, Andhra, Draviḍa, Varvara, Tājjika [Tājika], Vaṃkina, Hūṇa, Khasa, Gurjjara-Mālavika. . . .[26]

The list represents a combination of what Rājaśekhara would include in his *janapadas* of four directions; otherwise, the members of the list,

including the Tājikas, Pārasikas, Hūṇas and Turuṣkas, would not be out of place in Rājaśekhara's *deśa-vibhāga* (divisions of the country). The political adversary, in this kind of perception, is neither an 'insider' nor an 'outsider' in any territorial sense; he is one who needs to be mentioned as having been subjugated, along with others.

There are two other types of reference to the members of the 'foreigner' Muslim community, which are normally not brought into focus when Hindu–Muslim interface in historical perspective is the theme of discussion. One type of reference is to a member of a community such as Tājika or Turuṣka, who is not a raider or a political adversary but is viewed as a resident, as an active member of the local community. He can be a local ruler, governing a province on behalf of his sovereign, as was the case with Madhumati (Sanskritized form of Muhammad), the Tājika governor of Saṃyāna-maṇḍala, a representative of his Rāṣṭrakūṭa sovereign.[27] Such a ruler, or otherwise common members of a local community with Muslim names, could naturally be involved in acts of donation or dispute settlement concerning local religious establishments which were not Islamic. The documents generated by such occasions are not by any means informed by a sense of political or religious difference. Such documents are not concerned with statements of identity but with local events and with reference to participants in such events.

Another type of reference is to sovereign rulers who may happen to be of 'foreign' such as Turuṣka descent. I have shown it elsewhere,[28] but this is a point which needs reiterating, that a ruler of Turuṣka descent could be eulogized as a Śaka ruler in a Sanskrit inscription in the same terms as a ruler of 'indigenous' descent; the text of the eulogy has no reference to the 'insider–outsider' divide. For example, in the heyday of the Sultanate, a Sanskrit inscription of the thirteenth century from Delhi, could say this of Ghiyasuddin Balban—Śrī Hammīra Gayāsaṃdina of the inscription:

> The earth being now supported by this sovereign, Śeṣa, altogether forsaking his duty of supporting the weight of the globe, has betaken himself to the great bed of Viṣṇu; and Viṣṇu himself, for the sake of protection, taking Lakṣmī on his breast, and relinquishing all worries, sleeps in peace on the ocean of milk.[29]

The Turuṣka/Śaka sultan here is considered as the able representative of Viṣṇu, the protector of the earth.[30]

The point about citing such diversity of reference is that different images are embedded in the texts about those who tend almost invariably

to be reduced to the undifferentiated category of 'Muslim'. The perspective which argues for viewing the structure of Indian society in terms of heterogeneity would be equally valid here; in fact, such a perspective would be essential for making sense of the various, often contradictory, ways in which the 'Muslim' communities are mentioned in the sources of this period.

It must, at the same time, be noted that despite this heterogeneity, distinct communities such as the Tājikas, Pārasikas, Turuṣkas and others could be viewed in terms of an umbrella-identity which would not be equivalent to a *janapada* identity. In other words, in around 1000, a Tājika or a Turuṣka would not be identified—as a Muslim would be identified today in terms of his state/linguistic affiliation—as a Tiliṅga, Mālava, Vaṅga or Kuntala—all names of distinct *janapada* units. The absence of distinct *janapada* identity, combined with commonality of faith and social habits led to these communities being considered (Turuṣka, Tājika, Pārasika, etc.) as aggregative, distinct categories. This aggregative category was like the aggregative category 'Hindu' coined in Arabic and Persian sources. However, it did not have religion as its primary reference point. The non-Hindu aggregative category was defined by using either ethnic Śaka or Turuṣka as a generic name or by using terms like Mleccha or Yavana.[31] A chronological survey of non-Arabic, non-Persian sources, including writings in vernacular languages, will perhaps reveal that increasingly the terms Turuṣka (Turk, Turuk in vernacular), Mleccha and Yavana came to denote the aggregative category which was used to distinguish it from the other aggregative category 'Hindu'.[32]

The use of a specific ethnic term like Turuṣka or of terms such as Mleccha and Yavana in a generic sense as well as the interchangeability of these terms is of great social and cultural significance. The nature of difference, which use of these terms suggested, pointed to exclusion from and existence outside the society which could be defined in Brāhmaṇical terms, a society which was expected to adhere to a set of behavioural codes.[33] The difference thus could not be specifically religious; the perception of difference was in terms of whether the members of the community perceived could be considered as members of one's own community or whether they were to be regarded as outside it. Let me try to clarify this point by referring to the vicissitudes through which the term Yavana, commonly used with reference to Muslim communities, passed. Derived from the name of Ionia in Asia Minor, *Yona* (Yavana) of the inscriptions of Mauryan emperor Aśoka (third century BC) referred to

Greeks of both the Seleucid empire and his own empire. In the post-Maurya period and in the early centuries of the Christian era, with the enlargement of contact with the Hellenistic world, Yavanas were the Greeks from Bactria in north Afghanistan and those who came from the Hellenistic world, distinct from the Śakas, Pahlavas, Tuṣāras or Kuṣāṇas of Western-Central Asia.[34] In south India, the Yavanas, figuring frequently in Tamil and Sanskrit sources, have been written about in the following terms:

> They were overseas westerners who came in ships, bringing gold, wine, and exchanged them for precious gems, crystal and pepper. They also settled in separate colonies called *yavana-padi, yavanar irukkai* or *yavana ceri* in the capitals and port towns of the Tamil kings. They had dreadful weapons and were fierce fighters and were employed as guards to protect the gates of the royal forts. They spoke in violent tongue and were often quarrelsome. . . . The Yavanas were great and skilful architects designing and constructing attractive structures like pavilions. Some of the royal palaces of the Tamil kings were designed and built by them. They were called *yavanat taccar*. . . .[35]

The image of the Yavanas here is that of a different people. They were of course outside the local social structure. Like the Mlecchas, the 'barbarians', the Yavanas too could not be integrated into the social fabric. The image is not necessarily that of those who could be a danger to the established social order, but in Sanskrit texts of the Purāṇic genre, the Yavanas could indeed be a threat to society.[36] The danger, when the Yavanas were perceived as the 'other' (not simply different), was thus not specifically to religion in a restricted, ritualistic sense, but to those institutions which were repeatedly highlighted as the signposts (Brāhmaṇas, *agrahāras*, varṇa, temples, idols) of that social order.

This perspective on the homogenization of distinct ethnic communities, through the use of generic terms like Turuṣka, Mleccha or Yavana may help us understand why: (i) there is hardly any reference to the Muslims as a religious community, except in a specifically religious context,[37] (ii) why a term like Mleccha (although not ethnic Turuṣka and Yavana with a transformed meaning), which designated social outsiders like hunting tribes, could also apply to the Muslim communities, and (iii) why reference to Islamic religious context and to the site of Islamic worship could be made in terms which could correspond to one's own religious ideas and practices. For example, a mid-thirteenth-century Sanskrit inscription of Gujarat, referring to the construction of a mosque (*masigiti*), mentions not only non-Muslim local patronage towards the construction

of this mosque in the form of donations but also to the mosque being a *dharmasthāna*, a place of worship like a Hindu temple, to the concept of *puṇya* and *pātaka* (of merit and sin) in relation to the nature of one's attitude towards this place of worship and to divinity in terms which would make divinity congruous and identifiable with Hindu divinity.[38]

It is not, however, that the 'otherness' of the Muslim communities, when they are perceived as the 'others', was always indicative of a demarcated social space and not religious. In the twelfth century, a century preceding the construction of the mosque mentioned above in Gujarat, there was destruction of a mosque in another Gujarat port town by 'fire-worshippers' and 'infidels', which the king was magnanimous enough to reconstruct.[39] The 'otherness' which is specifically religious is very much integral to the kind of mutual exclusiveness which Vidyāpati, court poet of Mithila in north Bihar, articulates towards the close of the fourteenth century in his *Kīrtilatā*:

> The Hindus and the Turks live at the same place. One ridicules the religion (dharma) of the other. There is resonance of call for prayer among some [Muslims]; among some there is Veda recitation. Among some [Muslims], there is intermingling; among some there is separatedness.[40]

The *Kīrtilatā* goes on to elaborate on the differences and on the religious and other methods by which the Turks oppressed the Hindus. Religious disputation was the theme of other texts as well, an excellent example of which is the *Hindu-Turk Samvād* of Eknāth, a Maharashtrian bhakti poet of the sixteenth century. Charged with recrimination, the debate between the Hindu and the Turk regarding each other's religious beliefs and practices is 'full of the intensity of religious tensions and polemics'. What is interesting in this debate is the degree of knowledgeability which the two contesting protagonists seem to exhibit with regard to each other's religion. Eknāth is therefore able to close the debate with a 'kind of idealised vision of the symbiosis the two communities would achieve'. The 'idealised vision of the symbiosis', which ultimately meant acceptance by the two protagonists that there is really no difference before God, the differences being man-made, extended to the stage in which origin myths could trace the different descents of the two communities, the Kafirs or the Hindus and the Yavanas (the Muslims) to the simple fact of contestation between two deities, Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu.[41]

There, then, were different perceptions of the Muslim communities and of Islam as there was heterogeneity in the ways in which the non-Muslim society and religious beliefs, practices and institutions constituted

an aggregate. The boundary-line between the 'self' and the 'other' could be sharply etched as when the Yavanas were the special invitees of Kali who presided over the evil age; when they were destroyers of temples and idols and annihilators of Brāhmaṇas; when, in short, they stood for the destruction of the ideal social order. In a perception like this, but only as late as the eighteenth century, there could be a distinction between Yavana-*deśa* (the country of the Yavanas) and *svadeśa* (one's own country). At the same time, in the same century, the king of the Yavanas, like 'Śaka' king Ghiyasuddin Balban of thirteenth-century Delhi, could be seen in a text like *Parasarāmacaritra* (1773) (a history of the Brāhmaṇa Peshwas of Maharashtra) in the following terms:

> The king of the Yavanas protected this earth with justice. . . . The four varṇas which had accepted the Pāṇḍavas (the rulers of Hastināpur in the *Mahābhārata*) as their chiefs accepted these (Muslims) as their own. The Yavanas reciprocated this honour and protected the.tributary chiefs. . . . They treated the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras, each according to their merits. They did not violate the *tīrthas* and *kṣetras* (religious centres) and they showed great consideration in maintaining them. They listened with great respect . . . to the debates of the *śāstras* and the stories of the *Mahābhārata*. However, some Muslims found such activities objectionable and contrary to their tenets and contemplated the dissolution of this amity.[42]

IV. Summing Up

One of the major anomalies in modern historical narratives on India is that whereas all such narratives are prefaced with a pronouncement on India's essential unity in diversity, the narratives are almost uniformly unilinear and flat, with hardly any reference to how diversities can be integrated into the narrative. By saying this I am not proposing to question the credibility of the 'meta-narratives' of Indian history;[43] I am simply trying to point to the inadequacy of the accepted paradigm of the 'self' and the 'other' for 'historical knowing' in so far as the Indian world of around 1000 is concerned. In terms of historiography, two major opposites seem to emerge in this world between 1000 and 1200. One is represented by a rupture: the rupture marking the end of ancient India and the beginning of the medieval. This rupture of modern historiography, conventionally stated in terms of a change in the nature of political succession, is very different from the way political succession was viewed in pre-colonial historiography, even when the Mlecchas or Yavanas were seen to replace earlier dynasties.[44] The emergence of the second set

of opposites was that of conquest and resistance; in the apparent shift from political history to cultural history—to issues such as formation of identities and consciousness—the hypothesis of cultural opposition has given rise to notions of the production of epics and counter-epics,[45] of xenophobia,[46] of cultural fault-line,[47] of ethnogenesis in frontier settings.[48] These notions highlight the search for 'self' and the 'other', in the singular, as credible themes in various enterprises of history-writing on this period. The points one needs to consider are: (i) whether working with sets of opposites is rewarding in taking note of all contexts in which texts, which are our main source of knowledge about the past, were produced, (ii) whether premises of static 'self' and the 'other' can always clarify the not-unusual ambivalent, and even 'contradictory', conditions of human existence, and the texts they produce. Taking the Muslim as the 'other', as the monolith which is the site of Hindu resistance, will make one lose sight of the 'others' who are present in the monolith. Let me illustrate this by citing a line from an important piece of writing which I have often quoted from in this essay:

> Alauddin Khalji's conquest of the Yādavas of Devagiri (1296) signalled the entry of the Muslims into Maharashtra.[49]

This sentence blocks out completely the presence of the Muslim traders and of even governors on the western coast from at least the tenth century; the image of a conqueror is the only image which can fit the monolith Muslim of history. This monolithic image further blocks any form of change for the Indian Muslim. The cultural animosity between Persian and Hindu which has been talked about in the context of medieval India does not take note of how Muslims of Bengal would have related to the creative phase of Bengali vernacular in the period of the Bengal Sultanate (1338–1538).[50] The adverse linguistic image of the oppressive Yavana of the Sanskrit *Madhurā-Vijayam* may have been that of one in whose house parrots were taught to speak Persian,[51] but considering the various cultural/linguistic regions of India, this is an image which can be supplemented by other images, not frozen in time, but shaping and reshaping themselves as a historical inevitability.

I would like to conclude this essay by juxtaposing excerpts from three different texts in order to suggest that accommodation of variety (the word being part of the title of my essay) may be possible even when categorical assertion denying variety may also be the preferred generalization from the reading of a set of texts:

a. Muslim impact and rule in India generated two literary growths: a Muslim epic of conquest, and a Hindu epic of resistance and of psychological rejection. The two literary growths were planted in two different cultures; in two different languages, Persian and Hindi, in two mutually exclusive religious, cultural and historical attitudes each confronting the other in aggressive hostility. (Ahmad, Aziz 1963)[52]
b. Sagara who was the crest-jewel of the family of Prāgvaṭa . . . who had made pilgrimages to the sacred Śatruñjaya and other holy places . . . in company with the saintly Guṇarāja, the leader of a company of pilgrims, with the farman of the illustrious Sultan Ahmad—who was a person worthy to be the vessel of human life able to cross the mundane ocean which was being filled with the great acts of innumerable merits. . . . (Ranapur Jaina Temple Inscription of 1440)[53]
c. In fifty-six languages one God is exalted with different words . . . cleavages arise because of harangues in different tongues. . . . I salute the sacred *Om* by which the God creator (*Nārāyaṇ*) is known. Muslims salute him as *yā Allāh*. . . . (Sheikh Mahammad, *Yogasaṃgrāma*)[54]

Irrespective of whether one is talking of 1000 or of a much later period, one should wonder if these texts can all be accommodated within the paradigm of the monolithic 'self' and the similarly monolithic 'other'.

Notes and References

1. 'Foreword' by K.M. Munshi in R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Age of Imperial Kanauj* in the multi-volume series *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955), p. xxiii. The general editor R.C. Majumdar's remarks were slightly, but not substantially, different: 'The end of the first millennium . . . was a turning point in the history of India. India was on the verge of a great political transformation to which the nearest precedent is furnished by the invasion of the Aryans about three thousand years earlier.' Majumdar goes on to elaborate: 'But the external invasion was not the only factor of importance. The internal change was also a momentous one. The collapse of the Pratihāra empire brought into prominence new powers, known later under the collective name of "Rajputs", who played a dominant part in Indian history throughout the medieval period. They constituted a definite break with the old, and ushered in a new age both in political and cultural history of India.' Ibid., 'Preface', p. xxxv.

   It may be surmised that the role of the 'Rajputs' in the Preface has been highlighted because of their perceived resistance to the rule of the 'others' in the medieval period which, according to Munshi, began with the Gaznavide invasion of Sultan Mahmud of Gazni.

Despite its integration into the nationalist discourse of history-writing, the disjunction in India is really a part of colonial history: 'In that colonial history, India was already a bounded entity inhabited by two religiously defined communities. And in that India, British historians imagined Hindus as the original inhabitants and Muslims rather as they, the British, imagined themselves: as foreign rulers, as imperial rulers, who arrived as successful conquerors.' Barbara D. Metcalf, 'Presidential Address: Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4 (1955), 953.

2. See Partha Chatterjee, 'Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal', in David Arnold and David Hardiman, eds, *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha* (2nd print, Delhi, 1995), pp. 1–49.
3. Cynthia Talbot attributes this characterization to S. Pollock, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Staff: Hindu–Muslim Identities in Pre-colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37 (1995), 696.
4. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad, 1976).
5. See, for example, the Preface *in The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I: *c.* 1200–*c.* 1750 (Cambridge University Press, 1982).
6. *Janna: Tale of the Glory-Bearer, The Episode of Candaśāsana*, translated from the Kannada with a foreword by T.R.S. Sharma (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1994), pp. 8–9.
7. *Madhurā-Vijayam of Gaṇgā Devī*, edited with a historical introduction by S. Thiruvenkatachari (Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, 1957), pp. 60–2.
8. *Madhurā-Vijayam*, p. 61.
9. *Viṣṇupurāṇam*, 2.3.1.
10. For *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, I have used the text edited by N.N. Chakravarti in Bengali: *Rājaśekhara o Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (Santiniketan, 1960).
11. *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, xvii.
12. For implications of the statement made by Medhātithi, commentator of *Manusmṛti*, on the limits of *Āryāvarta*, see Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India* (Delhi, 1991), p. 161.
13. N. Venkataramanayya and M. Somasekhara Sharma, 'Vilasa Grant of Prolaya Nayaka', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 32 (reprinted, Delhi, 1987), pp. 239–68.
14. See S. Pollock, 'India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity', *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 127, no. 3 (1998), pp. 41–73.
15. *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, vii.
16. See B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims* (Delhi, 1998), ch. I.

17. Tiruvalangadu plates state this with reference to the Cola ruler Rājarāja I: But Rāma was excelled by this (king) whose powerful army crossed the ocean by ships and burnt up the King of Laṅkā.
K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas* (University of Madras, reprint of 2nd edition, 1975), p. 172.
18. L.D. Barnett, 'Three Inscriptions from Hottur', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 16 (reprinted, Delhi, 1983), pp. 73–5.
19. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (Oxford University Press, 1966), ch. 8.
20. S.C. Banerji and A.K. Gupta, trans., *Bilhaṇa's Vikramāṅkadeva-caritam* (Calcutta, 1965), III. 61, 65, 74; IV. 18, 20.
21. Sita Krishna Nambiar, *Prabodhacandrodaya of Kṛṣṇa Miśra* (Sanskrit text with English translation, a critical Introduction and index) (Delhi-Patna-Vārāṇasī, 1971).
22. For example, at Nalanda, Buddhist divinities Trailokyavijayā and Aparajitā are shown, in their images, trampling upon Śiva and Gaurī, and upon Gaṇésa, respectively. Heruka is represented as dancing upon a prostrate Jaina Tīrthaṅkara. C.S. Upasak, ed., *Nalanda: Past and Present* (Silver Jubilee Souvenir) (Nalanda, 1977), pp. 109–13.
23. Similarly, in an inscription of 972, at the temple of Natha near Udaipur in south Rajasthan, the composer of the inscription could be thus described: 'who was the medicine for the disease of the Syadvada [Jaina doctrine], who always pulled down the doctrines of free-thinking and who was the thunderbolt to the mountains of pride of the Sugatas'. *A Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions* (published by the Bhavnagar Archaeological Department, n.d.), pp. 71–2.
24. J.F. Fleet, 'Inscriptions at Ablur', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 5 (reprinted, Delhi, 1984), pp. 255–6. See also David N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: Two Lost Śaivite Sects* (Delhi, 1972), passim.
25. For references, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other?*
26. D.C. Sircar, 'Rashtrakuta Charters from Chinchani', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 32, pp. 55–60.
27. V.V. Mirashi, *Inscriptions, of the Śilāhāras* (*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 6) (Delhi, 1977), pp. 71–5.
28. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other*? p. 52.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., for further discussion and other kinds of representation.
31. For relevant discussions, see ibid.; in addition, see Romila Thapar, 'The Image of the Barbarian in Early India', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Delhi, 1978); Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India*; Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self. . .'

32. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other?* Appendix I, for an attempt to prepare a chronologically arranged chart up to AD 1400.
33. For relevant discussions, Romila Thapar, 'The Image of the Barbarian in Early India'; Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India*.
34. H.P. Ray, 'The Yavana Presence in Ancient India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 31 (1988), 34–5.
35. R. Nagaswamy, *Roman Karur* (Madras, 1995), p. 5.
36. Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India*, pp. 120–3.
37. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other?* passim.
38. D.C. Sircar, 'Veraval Inscription of Chaulukya–Vaghela Arjuna, AD 1264', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 34 (1961–2) (Delhi, 1963), pp. 141–50.
39. A.K. Majumdar, *Chaulukyas of Gujarat* (A Survey of the History and Culture of Gujarat from the Middle of the Tenth to End of the Thirteenth Century) (Bombay, 1956), p. 331.
40. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Bāṅglāya Hindu–Musalmāner Samparka: Madhyayug* (in Bengali) (Calcutta, 1981), 10–11, 92.
41. N. Wagle, 'Hindu–Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra', in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke, eds, *Hinduism Reconsidered* (revised edition, Delhi, 1997), pp. 134–52.
42. Ibid., pp. 138–9.
43. See Barbara D. Metcalf, 'Presidential Address', p. 952.
44. Partha Chatterjee, 'Genealogy of the Past'; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other?*; N. Wagle, 'Hindu–Muslim Interactions'.
45. Aziz Ahmad, 'Epic and Counter-Epic in Medieval India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 83 (1963), 470–6; see also Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (1st Indian edition, Delhi, 1999), ch. 3.
46. S. Pollock, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 53, no. 2 (1993), 261–97.
47. S. Joshi and B.S. Josh, 'The State in Medieval North India and the Cultural Faultline', in *Struggle for Hegemony in India*, vol. 3 (1941–7) (Delhi, 1994), ch. 6.
48. Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self'.
49. N. Wagle, 'Hindu–Muslim Interactions', p. 134.
50. See Sukumar Sen, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās* (in Bengali), vol. I, part I (revised 3rd edition, Calcutta, 1959), chs. 5 and 6.
51. It should be remembered that even before the arrival of Persian, the speech-habits of different communities could evoke criticism. Apart from Rājaśekhara (see note 15), refer to the following comment of Bilhaṇa, the author of *Vikramāṅkadeva-caritam*:

    Having visited Somanātha he gave up the grief caused by the acquaintance, on the way, of those people of Gujarāṭa who, always impure, as they are, do not tie the *kakṣā*, and speak something (i.e. language) which is contemptible.

    Vikramāṅkadeva-caritam, 18.97.

52. See note 45.
53. *A Collection of Prakrit and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, pp. 114–16. The text has the following: *Śrīmad-Āhammada-suratrāṇa-datta-furamāna*. . . .
54. N. Wagle, 'Hindu–Muslim Interactions', p. 142.

Historiography and History as Communication

Historiography and History as Communication

CHAPTER 11

Trends of Research on Ancient Indian Economic History*

According to the scheme of periodization generally in vogue, the ancient period of India's long-distance history continues down to the close of the thirteenth century.[1] The objective of this essay is to prepare a brief statement of recent trends of research on the economic history of this period. I am not sure that I can accomplish it satisfactorily not only because the range of aspects even within a segmented field like economic history is vast but also because perspectives on specific issues in the field can vary widely.

My statement therefore will seek to focus on some of the current debates in addition to highlighting the trends that seem to be emerging from detailed empirical research. What is highlighted here is of course related to a somewhat subjective perception of issues which need to be highlighted; details which may otherwise be important will not occur here—this is an omission which is perhaps inevitable in such a condensed presentation.

Before I attempt to prepare the statement, I believe reference to a few preliminary points would be in order. Since they have a crucial bearing on the study of early Indian economic history, I select two—albeit unrelated—points here. First, a study of the economy of India—more so of the early period—must begin by taking note of disparities in different spatial contexts. Considering the regional diversities in India as a subcontinent,

*Reprinted from the *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, vol. 18 (1988–9), Calcutta University. Intended primarily as a guide, this was originally presented as a paper at a seminar organized by Madhya Pradesh Uchcha Siksha Anudan Ayog at Bhopal several years back. Since the original plan to bring out the papers presented at the seminar in a single volume has not, to my knowledge, materialized so for, I offer it to students in the hope that it will serve the purpose of introducing to them an outline of early Indian economic history. Only some bibliographical additions have been made to the published papers.

disparities are understandable. What I would like to draw attention to is not so much regional disparities but disparities in levels of material cultures coexisting and at the same time interacting with one another. At a given point of time, patterns of culture may have varied from one region to another, but equally significantly, even within what we tend to consider a regional unit of study or within a seemingly undifferentiated political region, the range of cultures would have varied considerably. The point needs to be stressed somewhat because often a level of material culture in a region—say, for example, urban culture—is taken to determine the level of culture across the entire subcontinent. There are exceptions, but in general even new research on the economic history of early India does not seem to be aware of this problem. Archaeology, overwhelmingly concerned with material cultures of the pre-literate past, has however imbibed a vital lesson from the work of geographers, and this comes through in the following quote from a recent work on Indian archaeology. 'We must recall that in the Indian subcontinent distinct, self-contained social groups, at different levels of technological and cultural development, survived right into this century. They include hunting and collecting tribes, pastoral nomads, shifting cultivators, traditional settled agriculturists, modern "developed" agriculturists and several levels of urban industrial society, all coexisting and economically interdependent. This provides us with a basic model for past development.'[2]

The second point is of course stating the obvious: it is the rather frustrating fact that quantification in any meaningful sense is not possible in ancient Indian economic history. Anyone familiar with the nature of sources on the basis of which this history is reconstructed will easily understand why this is so. This statement is not really invalidated by the uses which have from time to time been made of statistical methods and of computers in analysing archaeological material like stone tools or pottery, coin series or a rich corpus of epigraphical material from early medieval south India; meaningful quantification in areas like measurement of production, prices, population estimates—although occasionally attempted—however still remains beyond the reach of the economic historian of early India. Despite the wealth of early medieval inscriptional data on rural settlements we have not yet been able to prepare a definitive assessment if—and to what extent—there was extension of areas of cultivation in that period. Similarly, questions such as sizes of holdings and their distribution, the quantum of surplus available for exchange, the sizes or number of urban centres at any given point of time, to specify only a few, relate directly to the concern of an economic historian, but

given the nature of the source material, it may be unrealistic to suppose that even future research would provide us with dependable figures. The point about absence of quantification in the field is then that the economic history of ancient India can at the most reveal certain trends and impressions. And it is these trends which require to be assessed so that they are not stretched to the point of being accepted as irreplaceable truths.

In what then have recent researches on the economic history of ancient India made any significant departures from researches in the past? I shall first attempt to identify the areas in which work over the last four decades or so may be considered significant and then try and elaborate. It is perhaps needless to add that what is significant in certain new trends of research does not necessarily emanate only from availability of a substantial corpus of new data but also from new perspectives—perhaps not always appropriate perspectives—that have been brought to bear upon material for long available to researchers. In considering what may be taken to represent significant trends in research on early Indian economic history, I would like to dwell on three points: (i) There has been since independence a steady accumulation of data not thoroughly or properly processed for a study of the evaluation and consolidation of the agrarian base of Indian society, suggesting a vast chronological expansion of the scope of Indian agrarian history. (ii) There have been attempts, perhaps as yet tentatively, to define the stages of early Indian economy. (iii) Related to these are attempts to analyse early Indian economy not in isolation but in terms of broader contexts of society and polity. In fact, the conventional lines demarcating economic history from other areas of enquiry are often getting blurred. This constitutes a trend which is likely to have meaningful implications for future perceptions of the domain of economic history of early India. For elaboration I shall take up the points in the order in which I have enumerated them above.

I

Ancient Indian economic history, started, up to a certain stage of enquiry, with the incidental material embedded in the corpus of Vedic literature. When the chronological scope of the work was different, it still leaned heavily on references in literary texts. N.C. Bandyopadhyaya's *Economic Life and Progress in Ancient India*, Prannath's *A Study of the Economic Condition of Ancient India*, U.N. Ghosal's *Agrarian System of Northern India* and A.N. Bose's *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India (c. 600 BC–AD 200)*, to cite only a few standard works, are compilations,

of varying degrees of competence, based on literary information, supplemented by epigraphic evidence. The discovery of the Harappan culture in the 1920s, the expanding horizons of this culture and the wealth of material which the Harappan culture sites yielded, continued to remain peripheral to the study of early Indian economic history. Despite the tremendous spate of output on various horizons of pre-Harappan and Harappan cultures in recent years—to the extent that it can now be considered a separate area of specialization—my focus for the present is not on these cultures. What may be considered significant is that proto-historic investigations across the subcontinent have revealed the existence of cultures from the pre-metal through copper–bronze to iron age stage, the significance of which no economic historian of early India can afford to ignore. Such culture areas, some of which obviously interacted with Harappan culture, were located in south Rajasthan and Malwa, the western Deccan, the southern Deccan, and in the Ganga basin stretching down to the margins of the middle and lower Ganga basin. The horizons expanded with the chronological differential distribution of iron roughly from the beginning of the first millennium BC. What is important is not simply the technological stages which the culture regions represent, but their implications for the crucial transition to the stage in which settled farming communities emerged in different subregions of India. This is an area where history has only imperfectly responded to archaeology so far—at least in the generally used textbooks—and it seems therefore necessary to highlight a few features from among the vast corpus of archaeological data now available. First, the emergence of agriculture in different subregions varies considerably in chronological terms, but for most regions agricultural origins, covering such major crops as wheat, barley, rice, varieties of millets and grams, can be dated before the arrival of iron. The crucial stage in this history may be said to date between the second millennium BC to the beginning of the first millennium BC. Outside the Harappan horizons, it was this period which witnessed on a significant scale the beginning of the utilization of 'ecological niches' for agriculture and crystallization of farming communities. Second, the proto-historic cultures also reveal the presence of a wide range of essential crafts. Although the major cultural assemblage at archaeological sites is constituted by pottery—various techniques involved in the production of which suggest a high degree of specialization—proto-historic communities practised other crafts; analyses of individual craft items of metal tools in particular may provide useful insights into the pattern of proto-historic economy and social organization. Production of crafts, particularly of metal tools, raises the question of specialization and location of the specialization in

the total social context of community organization; this is an area which awaits analysis. Third, another issue which derives from the development of crafts in proto-historic economy is that of exchange. In contrast to the work done in this area in the context of Harappan culture, it remains somewhat neglected in other proto-historic contexts, despite occasional suggestions which emanate from archaeologists. Recent studies in ore-artefact correlations in metallurgical technology have begun to locate the sources of ores in metal crafts; this can be stretched to reveal networks of exchange between communities with differential access to sources of metal and technical skill. One relevant example may be cited. Ahar (Udaipur) in south Rajasthan was located close to sources of copper and evidence of copper smelting is present at Ahar, but the range of metal tools is far more impressive at Navdatoli on the Narmada, located away from such a source. This is not to suggest that exchange originated only in the proto-historic context or that it concerned artefacts in metal alone. The example is cited only to urge a long-term perspective regarding the history of exchange, which tends to be taken to coincide with the beginnings of the historic period. Fourth, proto-historic cultures, by revealing certain features of community organization, also perhaps suggest the emergence of a certain degree of social stratification. Archaeologists have only recently begun to take serious note of the social organizational aspects of these data. Even so, such stray lists of evidence as concentration of metal tools in a single house at Ahar, hierarchy of settlement centres in the chalcolithic region of Maharashtra, high-value grave goods at the early iron age burial complex at Mahurjhari in Vidarhha and perhaps the presence of fortification at Daimabad and Eran may validate archaeologists' suggestion that the social organization of the early farming communities was not totally homogeneous or undifferentiated in terms of access to resources generated by or available to such communities.

II

Having briefly underlined the significance of the proto-historic data, it is necessary to proceed to examine how this may link up with the stages of economy postulated for the historical period. The linkage, as I understand it, is provided by the importance accorded in current research to the question of the emergence of the state and of urbanization in the Ganga basin around the middle of the first millennium BC. The starting point of this enquiry is still generally Ṛgvedic pastoralism—although it has not been suggested that it was organized around transhumance—and a subsequent shaping up of a technologically advanced agrarian society in

the Ganga basin as represented in later Vedic and early Buddhist literature. Besides the suggestion that there is correspondence between the early iron phase of the so-called Painted Grey Ware culture of the Punjab, the Indo-Gangetic divide, eastern Rajasthan and upper Ganga basin and the culture reflected in the later Vedic literature, it has further been assumed that the increasing use of iron in the Ganga bāsin generated the social surplus which was a prerequisite for the emergence of *janapada* states and of what has come to be labelled as 'second urbanization'. This assumption has been subjected to some debate, but what is relevant for the present discussion is to note the phases which are taken generally to succeed the economic transformation with the Ganga basin as its epicentre. The first phase, coinciding with the beginning of the Northern Black Polished Ware culture around the middle of the first millennium BC, extended to the rise of the Mauryas towards the close of the fourth century BC. The agrarian base of the state structures and of the urban centres was provided by revenue-yielding 'peasant units of production' and, as attested by literary evidence, the phase was also marked by the rise of artisan groups and *seṭṭhis*, trade and crafts being assumed to have been often organized in the form of guilds. The growing contact between the urban centres in the northwest, in the Ganga basin and in the Malwa region resulted in the formation of a network of trade routes, the major part of which was collectively known as Uttarāpatha and in the exploration of the Dakṣiṇāpatha as well. It is in this phase that metallic currency first made its appearance. The second phase corresponds to the period of Maurya rule. Since the pattern of Mauryan economy is generally reconstructed on the authority of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* and of the fragments of *Indica* of Megasthenes, the characterization of this phase is in terms of overarching state control over all sectors of the economy exercised through a highly organized bureaucracy. The magnitude of Mauryan bureaucratic and military organization is sometimes stretched to the point of suggesting that it drained the resources of the empire, ultimately leading to its collapse. Although it has been recently suggested that the structure of the Mauryan state and economy may perhaps be more fruitfully studied in terms of the metropolitan state in juxtaposition with other territories in varying stages of state formation, uniformity and overarching state control still appear to be held as hallmarks of the economy of this phase. Further research is likely to modify this rather rigid characterization of Mauryan economy by moving away from conventional sources and by examining more thoroughly the composite pattern of regional material cultures revealed by archaeology.

Taking several categories of source material into consideration, recent research characterizes the next phase, datable from the second century BC to the third century AD as representing the high watermark of the processes which began in the middle of the first millennium BC. The major features which highlight this phase are: (i) There was a vast expansion in the network of commercial and cultural interaction extending now to Central Asia, to the west and other regions. In fact, the period from the close of the second-first century BC is spoken of as that of Indo-Roman trade attested by both literary works and finds of Roman coins and other archaeological objects in India. (ii) There was a substantial increase in the number of urban centres which were no longer unevenly distributed but emerged in almost all subregions. Even a preliminary survey seems to reveal that this material culture was richest in what is termed as the Śaka–Kuṣāṇa phase—a phase which coincides with the period of Indo-Roman trade. (iii) There was a substantial increase in the volume and circulation of metallic currency, represented not only by the dynastic coinages of the Indo-Greeks, the Śaka–Pahlavas, the Kuṣāṇas, the Kṣatrapas or the Sātavāhanas, but by varieties of local series as well. Together, these features are seen to reflect a high degree of 'money economy' in this phase and it is the conjunction of the major features enumerated above which presents a sharp contrast to the subsequent phase of the economy.

This brings me to the rather tricky historiographical issue of Indian feudal formation. The general response of historians working on early India to the idea of Indian feudalism varies from uncritical acceptance and application of feudal terminologies to wholesale allergy, perhaps without sufficient awareness of the ongoing debate on the relevance of the concept in the context of non-European societies. My concern here is of course limited to exploring how the use of the concept relates to the current state of research on the economic history of early India as also to its bearing upon the chronology of the economic stages. The preliminary points to be made with regard to the concept of Indian feudalism in current research are: (i) it marks a departure from the previous practice of equating feudalism essentially with political decentralization, although decentralized, hierarchized polity continues to be an important component of the construct; (ii) the construct itself has undergone substantial modifications in the course of research. Although an analysis of the historiography of Indian feudalism would be an interesting exercise in itself, only a few relevant points of this historiography need to be mentioned.

At the initial stage of the emergence of the construct, Indian feudalism

was viewed as a result of processes generated from 'above' as well as from 'below' in the sense that feudalism in its early form denoted a somewhat direct relationship between a paramount ruler and his subordinate, tribute-paying but autonomous, rulers without the 'intermediacy of a class which was in fact a landowning stratum'; at its second stage 'a class of landowners developed within the village, between the state and the peasantry, gradually to wield armed power over the local population'. However, the first comprehensive monograph on Indian feudalism traced its genesis to the practice of grant of land with legal and administrative rights. The origin of this practice is now sought to be located in a social crisis, depicted in literary sources, which seems to have affected the peasants and the state alike. It is thus argued that in India the problem of the rise of the landed magnates is not connected with the decomposition of the slave mode of production but with the decreasing control of the peasant over his unit of production coupled with his restricted access to communal resources. Yet another view traces the genesis of Indian feudalism to the decline of urban centres resulting in the closed economy of the villages.

While there may not be any consensus regarding how feudalism originated in India, those who support the use of the concept seem to have reached a certain measure of unanimity regarding its economic features at least for the period extending from the fifth–sixth centuries to the ninth–tenth centuries: (i) it witnessed a steady growth of the stratum of intermediaries resulting in the subjection and immobility of landed peasants; (ii) trade was marginal to the 'closed', self-sufficient rural economy, urban centres declined and there was also a sharp fall in the circulation of metallic currency.

For how long did this pattern of economy continue? In the first detailed research on Indian feudalism, evidence relating to the eleventh–twelfth centuries seemed to present curiously contradictory features and it was therefore declared: 'The two centuries preceding the Turkish conquest marked both the climax and the decline of feudal economy in India.' This view is now questioned, and evidence of growth in economy, perhaps datable from the ninth–tenth century, is being viewed by some as reflecting the dynamism of Indian feudal formation. We have thus yet another phase in which the features of the economy were in some ways different from those obtaining from the fifth–sixth to the ninth–tenth centuries. Agrarian relations continued, in this formulation, to be marked by domination of the peasantry by various categories of landed magnates,

including by now large temple establishments with extensive holdings, but agrarian production witnessed several features of growth such as expansion of areas of cultivation, increase in the use of well and tank irrigation and perhaps a recognizable shift to the production of certain items of commercial agriculture which began to enter into networks of exchange. It is within this changed scenario of agrarian production that a new process of urbanization—as yet tentatively termed 'third urbanization'—and of commercial enterprise may be located. It has perhaps to be noted that this growth process was uneven. Thus while regional studies on Rajasthan, Gujarat, the Deccan and south India seem to indicate the process rather clearly, it is doubtful if it was in operation equally effectively in other regions. Because of the volume of the source material, particularly epigraphic material available for early medieval India, as also for other reasons, research on the economy of early medieval India, studies on this period are tending to become more and more region centred. Although in a sense this is a healthy trend since it brings regional patterns into sharper focus, it is at the same time likely to give rise to widely divergent approaches in the study and explanation of basically similar historical processes. However, like unevenness between regions, regional variations within broad historical processes may have been genuine enough. Two examples from recent research may be briefly cited. In the context of Tamilnadu, the emergence of early medieval urban centres is related to the growth of large temple complexes functioning as nodes in extensive agrarian trade and pilgrimage networks, while another study of the same phenomenon, in the upper Ganga basin, central India and the Deccan, view the centres as nodes where polity, exchange and crafts production converged. In the study of the structure of commerce of early medieval India, there again seems to be considerable difference between western Indian and south Indian patterns. While research on western India focuses on the proliferation, over time, of the centres of exchange, on items of exchange and on the gradual ascendancy of several merchant lineages, in the south of the Cola period, a hierarchy of marketing regions, with a supposedly autonomous *nāḍu* marketing unit at the base, is envisaged. In this model different distinct levels of trading regions are mediated by itinerant merchant groups, references to which in south Indian epigraphic material abound. In presenting the above sketch of how different stages of the economy down to the early medieval period have been worked out, it is not suggested that it necessarily merits consensus. In fact, the 'Indian feudalism' formulation—irrespective of

whether it is viewed as static or dynamic—has faced various brands of criticism. One set of arguments is directed against the validity of its empirical findings with regard to decline of trade and urban centres, paucity of coins and so on, while at a more meaningful level its critique underlines its inadequacy to expound the totality, in the Indian context, of the agrarian production within the framework of which alone the nature of the subjection of the peasantry—the core point in the Indian feudalism formulation—can be understood. However, the important point really is, that the debate is alive and is unlikely to be reduced to a futile polemic.

III

In a way the debate and the nature of the output of Indian feudalism illustrates my final point that the lines demarcating economic history from other areas of history are often getting blurred. But the point needs a little more elaboration. It is not suggested that in research monographs—and there is an abundance of such monographs—specifically devoted to the study of economic history or social and economic history together, the conventional frontier of economic history is always crossed. The worst casualty seems to be the lean chapter on 'Economic Conditions' almost invariably present in monographs on dynastic history as also in multi-volume history series widely used as textbooks. Breaking through the demarcation lines, where it does occur, has not been the result of introduction of new techniques in the study of economic history; it is rather a reflection of a need for new perspectives in the study of ancient Indian history in general. That terms like class, social stratification, social mobility, state formation, etc are now frequently used in the context of themes in ancient Indian history is indicative of this need, and at the same time, of growing interaction with concepts from other disciplines. Economic history is, in short, a beneficiary of a broader concern for understanding the chronology and dimensions of the evolution of Indian society. Once again, I have to limit myself to citing examples. Economic changes from the beginning of the first millennium BC, coinciding with the passage to the formation of the state, are found to relate directly to such issues as: (i) change in the position of the *rājan* or emergence of the institution of kingship, and the nature of the relationship between the priestly class and the king, (ii) emergence of the varṇa order in which polarity between two sets of varṇas crystallized, (iii) the emergence of *janapadas* as recognizable territorial entities which again did not represent undifferentiated space but denoted a range of settlement units such as *grāma, nigama, nagara* and so on. By the time the state crystallizes, the

economy of production cannot be comprehended in terms of the varṇa order alone, by taking the conventional characterization of the Vaiśyas as associated with *vārtā* (agriculture, cattle-keeping and trade) or of the Śūdras as subservient to the three higher varṇas. The issues that come up relate to the social and economic status of the *gahapatis*, and of the *dāsas* and *karmakāras*. The institution of slavery also understandably figures in this context. The distinction made between what were perceived as superior and inferior kinds of *śilpas* (crafts) urges an enquiry into the status of the groups in terms of the notion of purity and pollution, associated with their practice. Thus the economy of crafts production or of primitive pursuits, such as hunting, interaction with settled agriculture, has a social dimension too in that it brings in the question of caste hierarchy and untouchability. The point I am trying to make is that research on economic conditions in northern India roughly from the first half of the first millennium BC is no longer confined to compilation of data on crops and crafts or on the theoretical position of the Vaiśyas and Śūdras, but has extended to a wide range of themes such as the extent of the use of iron, the stages of urbanization and of state formation, the concept of *varṇasaṃkara* and differential status of occupational groups, hierarchy of settlements within *janapada* divisions and so on.

In the context of early medieval India too the concerns of economic historians considerably overlap with other concerns. The 'Indian feudalism' formulation has dimensions apart from those which are economic since it has to explore extra-economic compulsions in the complementary relationship of domination–subjection. Analyses of land grants, which constitute the empirical foundation of the formulation, extend to composition of donors and donees and continue to open up new areas for research. The phenomenon of the transfer of land has, apart from underlining the growing importance of religious beneficiaries, brought into sharp focus the process of the formation and composition of ruling elites like the *sāmantas* and *mahāsāmantas, maṇḍaleśvaras* and *mahāmaṇḍaleśvaras* down to the ranks of the *rāṇakas, rāutas, ṭhakkuras* and so on. The same material, used for the study of other dimensions of the early medieval pattern, has yielded fruitful results in examining the process of the emergence of the Rajputs as a political elite group; of the Kāyasthas as an occupation group; of regional differentiation and stratification within a varṇa, of social mobility among merchant groups as also among artisan groups. These are themes which are as much concerns of economic historians as they are of social and political historians, and obviously the themes are not limited to the ones that I have chosen to mention here.

This brief resumé, I am aware, is marred by omissions and over-simplifications; at the same time, it should be possible to identify many new areas and methodological dimensions which economic historians are yet to explore. The limited objective of this essay will have been served if it has been able to indicate the directions along which such explorations are likely to proceed.

Notes and References

1. Treating Indian history down to the thirteenth century as one chronological entity, only to be sharply distinguished from the post-thirteenth-century periods, is highly unsatisfactory. The scheme of periodization has therefore been re-examined repeatedly and current historiographical usage accommodates the term 'early medieval' within the chronological frame of 'ancient' to connote roughly the period between the seventh–eighth and the thirteenth centuries. Within these broad chronological divisions it is however possible to demarcate other phases as well, and one of the objectives of this essay would be to point to such possibilities.
2. Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, New Delhi, 1983, p. 62.

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(This text is based largely on the references listed here)

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CHAPTER 12

State and Economy in North India: Fourth Century to Twelfth Century*

To start with a somewhat general statement, the bulk of historical writings on the period which extends from the fourth to the twelfth century AD have perhaps never characterized it as an undifferentiated span of history but have, on the other hand, stressed broad differences between its two major segments. One segment corresponds to the period of Gupta rule (beginning of the fourth to the middle of the sixth century) and the other to the post-Gupta phase extending approximately down to the close of the twelfth century when Turkish power started to gain a firm political foothold in north India. The key element in this kind of differentiation—a differentiation which continues to figure prominently in many history textbooks—is the way the nature of Gupta rule is perceived among historians. The Guptas are seen to represent, like their predecessors the Mauryas, an era of empire. An empire is perceived as a political structure assiduously built by the military exploits of several charismatic royal personalities; it was simultaneously an outcome of the liberation of northern India from long-standing foreign rule and political unification, achieved by successfully suppressing centrifugal elements. In the case of the Guptas, their rise has been seen against the background of the presence of different pockets of power in north India: those controlled by the last rulers of the 'foreign' Kuṣāṇas; the *gaṇa-saṁgha janapadas*, unevenly distributed between Punjab and Uttar Pradesh Himalayas to Haryana and Rajasthan; and petty rulers of what have been called 'indigenous states'.[1] From this perspective of looking at the history of the emergence as well as the structure of the Gupta state, the Gupta was

*Reprinted from Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1995).

essentially the type of state which was expected to exist and which represented the norm. States represented by kingdoms of smaller dimensions were deviations from the standard and their presence on the political map only pointed to a situation in which centrifugal trends prevailed. The post-Gupta period, despite the presence of comparatively large-sized kingdoms such as those of the Gurjara–Pratihāras (second quarter of the eighth to the middle of the tenth century) and the Pālas (middle of the eighth to the early twelfth century) and despite creditable achievements of individual monarchs marked a fall from the standard.[2]

The above statement, rather a simplistic one, was made with the objective of underlining two points which it is necessary to be familiar with at the start of this essay. One, in writings on early India in general, correlation between a state structure perceived as an empire and social and economic development has become almost axiomatic. The case of the Gupta empire is excellently illustrative of this supposed correlation. We quote below from two publications which belong to the category of extensively used textbooks:

> a. . . . the Gupta empire . . . at full maturity, *once more* brings unity, peace and prosperity over nearly the whole of Northern India.[3] . . . the greater part of the country undoubtedly enjoyed high prosperity.[4]
>
> b. The imperial Guptas with whom the volume opens ably countered the centrifugal forces in Northern India and the kingdom, established by Chandragupta I . . . was shortly converted by his son, Samudragupta, into an empire. The Gupta empire, reared up by a succession of competent rulers, gave north India not only political stability and imperial peace, but also set an exemplary standard in all departments of life and culture. Indeed, the advent of the Guptas on the political stage ushered in an epoch which has rightly been called the Golden Age or the Classical Period of Indian history . . .[5]

The second initial point that we intend to make is that although perspectives on the state and economy in north India have gone through radical changes—and in many ways the new perspectives run parallel to and devoid of positive interaction with persisting stereotypes in textbooks—the image of the early Indian state, which is a carryover from certain strands of both colonial and nationalist historiography[6] remains a key element even in the new perspectives. In other words, what is perceived as the early north Indian state remains, in its stable structure or in its crisis, a key agency to explain, at least at an initial phase, changes which took place from the Gupta period onward. This is not to say that in the new perspectives the state is perceived as a type of 'Oriental Despotism' or

that monarchical achievements continue to be correlated with societal progress and stability. What is meant is that in its abstraction, the early Indian state continues to be perceived as a static structure with a stable territorial base. Therefore, notions like 'decentralization' or 'segmentation', to denote disintegration of the structure, and therefore an inferior political order, figure frequently in writings on the period. We shall return to this point in the course of our discussion to show how such notions are used to characterize the nature of the state in the period which we focus on in this essay.

II

Before we take up for detailed discussion the themes which have come to figure more prominently than others in recent writings on the state and economy in north India (400–1200), it is also necessary to make a few points regarding the dominant conceptual framework within which the major writings on the period may be located. Again, even at the risk of making a rather simplistic generalization, it may be stated that two key concepts constituting this framework are those of 'feudalism' and 'medievalism'. The new perspectives thus dispense with conventional ways of periodizing Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British; they further endeavour to avoid equating the conventional scheme of periodization with Ancient, Medieval and Modern. It is stressed that the terms used for periodization need to be connotative and should not simply correspond to a chronological span. By associating the advent of 'medievalism' with 'feudalism'—an association which is suggested by the way both 'feudalism' and the transition to the medieval period are located in the pre-twelfth-century period[7]—recent perspectives too use concepts which are derived from and are essential ingredients of European historiography. Some clarification will be in order here. When the point is made that recent writings on the period between 400 and 1200 are characterized by the use of such concepts as 'feudalism' and 'medievalism' which are borrowings from European historiography, it should not be taken to mean that such borrowings did not take place previously. The difference is that values attached to these concepts, in their uses in the Indian context, have changed over time. For example, analysis of the use of the term 'feudalism' in the Indian context[8] will bear out that it has had to bear the burden of wide-ranging connotations, but tending, generally, to signify political decentralization.[9] The same concept is now taken to relate to a particular type of 'social formation' which, according to one understanding, is defined 'by elements such as the form of labour process (determined by the extent of bondage and production for market),

the manner of extraction of surplus (e.g., land-tax, rent) and the system of distribution of the surplus (property rights) . . . Marc Bloch would add to these, as in his well-known definition of feudalism, some purely political and even cultural elements as well.'[10]

Despite this definition, it need not be understood that all those who write on AD 400–1200 in terms of the idea of 'social formation', project exactly identical ideas regarding the state and economy during that period. Broadly speaking, combined with the notion of 'social formation' it is the seminal empirical writings of Henry Pirenne[11] and Marc Bloch[12] which have perhaps served as models for those who began seriously working out empirical validation of 'feudalism' as a social formation in Indian history. This may explain the prominence accorded to features perceived as constituting the essence of feudalism, which figure somewhat commonly in the writings which focus on AD 400–1200. With the continuing enrichment and growth of literature on European feudalism, there have been some corresponding changes in the characterization of state and economy in the Indian feudal phase; this is apparent in the way recent works on European feudalism are cited to elucidate points of change and to draw comparisons.[13]

What we are trying to clarify from the points made above is that there are, simultaneously, commonality of approach that marks the writings of those who view the period in question (AD 400–1200) as representing a social formation different from what characterized the preceding period. This approach envisages analysis of social change, which encompasses changes in state and economy within a framework drawn from European historiography, that is, by considering the change from the early historical period to the beginning of the medieval (early medieval) period as somewhat comparable to the transition from classical to early medieval Europe; within this broad framework there are variations and the variations have largely depended on the manner in which changes in the period under discussion (AD 400–1200) have been viewed by individual historians. There have, further, been major shifts in the way processes leading to the crystallization of a new social formation have been constructed. Both points can perhaps be made a little more clear by citing, briefly, several major authors whose 'constructs' currently represent the dominant historiography on this period. Ray, who pointed to the emergence of a new state structure and economic order in the regional context of Bengal as part of a pan-Indian phenomenon from the Gupta and post-Gupta times, highlighted a hierarchical political order represented by *sāmantas* and *mahāsāmantas*, reduced control over *janapadas* and tenuous bonds with political allies as hallmarks of the new state structure.

The new economic order, in his assessment, came to be characterized by local, agrarian economy, largely devoid of commercial enterprise and the ethos of the early historical period. Ray equated the crystallization of this order with medievalism, the beginnings of which he assigned to the seventh–eighth century. The state structures in this order were regional, dynastic, sustained by an economic structure which had become transformed from 'money economy to natural economy'.[14] D.D. Kosambi's formulation[15] located the genesis of change—a change which was to reshape the structures of state and economy in a later period—prior to the fourth century. This formulation is articulated in terms of a two-stage theory of Indian feudalism; in this formulation, 'feudalism from above'—an early form of feudalism—denoted a somewhat direct relationship between a paramount ruler and his subordinate, tribute-paying but autonomous rulers, the network of such political relationships existing in a situation marked by the absence of an intermediary landowning stratum. At its 'second stage', a class of landowners developed within the village between the state and the peasantry, 'gradually to wield power over the local population'.[16]

These initial probings into the possibility of explaining changes in early historical society in terms of a 'feudal' model—as a challenge to the stereotype of absence of basic change in Indian society or to the image of change conceived in terms of dynastic shifts alone—came in for some measure of criticism, and there have been further shifts in efforts, among Indian historians, towards refining the model. An excellent sample of such efforts, which for the first time embodies results of substantial empirical research, is Sharma's *Indian Feudalism*. This work carries over elements of earlier constructs of Indian feudalism as a social formation; at the same time it marks a departure by stressing land grants as the key factor in the emergence of this social formation.[17] Despite such and other variations, the perceptions converge on certain points which are considered as essential characteristics of the social formation in terms of which the period between 400 and 1200 can be adequately understood. We now focus on these essentials in so far as they relate to the study of the state and economy in north India in the period under discussion.

III

The essence of the state structure, beginnings of which are located with varying emphasis in both pre-Gupta and Gupta periods, may be understood

by referring to two interrelated points which feature repeatedly in writings on the period under review: (i) decentralized administration and (ii) political hierarchy. Both points are posited as marking a sharp contrast to the state structure of the Mauryas (close of the fourth century BC to the beginning of the second century BC), the perceived contrast being expressed in such positive statements as: '. . . the Kuṣāṇa political organizaton did not possess that rigid centralization which characterized the Mauryan administrative machinery'.[18] Corrosion of centralization acquired a faster pace in the Gupta period. According to one opinion which envisages several stages in the evolution of early Indian polity, 'the fifth stage was marked by the process of decentralized administration in which towns, feudatories and military elements came to the forefront in both the Deccan and the north. This was partly neutralized by the emphasis on the divinity of the king. The Kuṣāṇa princes assumed the official title of *devaputra* and instituted the cult of the worship of the dead king, and the Sātavāhana princes came to be compared to deified epic heroes. The last age, identical with the Gupta period, may be called the period of proto-feudal polity.'[19]

The processes which worked towards administrative decentralization are essentially seen to have derived from: (i) the practice of making land grants along with administrative privileges, and (ii) the breakdown of the state's monopoly over the army. It is thus stressed that the beneficiaries who received grants of land from kings and their feudatories were given a wide range of fiscal and administrative immunities[20] and the immunities were such that: 'In grants, from the time of Pravarasena II Vākāṭaka onwards (fifth century AD), the ruler gave up his control over almost all sources of revenue, including pasturage, hides and charcoal, mines for the production of salt, forced labour, and all hidden treasures and deposits.' The administrative concomitant of these fiscal immunities was that the 'donor abandoned the right to govern the inhabitants of the village that were granted'.[21] The image of a decentralized administrative apparatus, or, more appropriately, of the virtual absence of any administrative apparatus, comes through most vividly in the following statement: 'The function of the collection of taxes, levy of forced labour, regulation of mines, agriculture, etc., together with those of the maintenance of law and order, and defence, which were hitherto performed by the state officials, were now step by step abandoned, first to the priestly class, and later to the warrior class.'[22] That the decay of state power was comprehensive is also suggested, it is believed, by the breakup of the army into 'small police garrisons'[23] as also through the process of the emergence

of virtually autonomous military officials.[24] At the level of commerce, the departure from the Mauryan pattern of rigidly state-controlled commerce and industry is seen in the emergence of autonomous *nigamas* and *śreṇīs*, both connoting corporate bodies which regulated their own affairs without interference from the state. The autonomy of the corporations is again believed to have crystallized by the late Gupta period. An example, often cited, is provided by a set of charters from western India dated to the close of the sixth century.[25] The charters were addressed to a group of traders and granted them various immunities; they exempted them from various dues, 'left them free to deal with labourers, herdsmen, etc. and authorised them to impose forced labour on certain artisans. The traders were allowed immunity from the entry of royal officials in their area and from payment of dues and rations for supporting these officials.'[26]

Administrative decentralization, manifest in different ways, was linked primarily with the emergence of political hierarchy, which again contrasts sharply with Mauryan bureaucratic centralization and the absence of intermediary layers in the Mauryan political system.[27]

Political hierarchy is seen as taking a recognizable shape only in the post-Mauryan period. Bureaucratic hierarchy is recognized as a feature of the Mauryan political–administrative system, and, in fact, a 'pyramidical bureaucratic structure' is seen to have been present in the Mauryan state.[28] But political hierarchy, which is suggested by a hierarchy of autonomous or semi-autonomous rulers and therefore indicative of dispersal of foci of political authority, was a phenomenon believed to have been only post-Mauryan in its origin in north India. Characteristics associated with the emergence of political hierarchy are seen in such designations as *kṣatrapa, mahākṣatrapa, daṇḍanāyaka, mahādaṇḍanāyaka* as also in royal designations like *rājā, mahārājā, rājādhirāja* and so on.[29] These designations became much more elaborate and indicative of a greater degree of political hierarchy in subsequent centuries. Further, an inscription of the Śaka–Kuṣāṇa period from north-western India has been cited to show[30] that a *kṣatrapa* (a term originally of Iranian root and more easily recognizable in the form *satrap*) could be both a *mahārājā* and a *grāmasvāmī* (lord of a village). This and other sources are offered as proof of linkage between landlordism and political hierarchy, starting from the village as its base.

A more significant development, from the point of view of the crystallization of a highly hierarchized political order, is seen to have taken place from the Gupta period onward. This development is best symbolized in the growth of the order of the *sāmantas*, giving rise, in Indian historiography, to the assumed equivalence of *sāmantavāda* with Indian

feudalism. The sharp changes which the term *sāmanta* went through over time underscore fundamental changes in Indian polity, reinforcing the image of a hierarchical political structure. The original meanings of *sāmanta* were: 'being on all sides', 'neighbouring', 'bordering' and so on.[31] Profound structural changes in the meaning of the term and their implications for corresponding changes in early Indian polity have been expressed rather forcefully by Kosambi: 'In the *Arthaśāstra*, it uniformly means neighbour or dependant neighbouring king. The *Amarakośa* (2.8.2) defines supreme monarch (*adhīśvara*) as a king who has subjugated all neighbouring rulers (*sāmanta*) without exception . . . on the other hand, *sāmanta* in seventh century and late epigraphs has to be translated as "feudal baron".'[32] Kosambi's translation of *sāmanta* as 'feudal baron' or his identification of Ḍāmaras of early medieval Kashmir, figuring prominently in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī*, as 'feudal lords'[33] may be controversial,[34] but they have often been cited to add strength to the construct of decentralized and hierarchized feudal polity of early medieval India. It is also envisaged that the term *sāmanta*—and obviously similar other terms—went through further changes in meaning in subsequent centuries; if in the Gupta period 'a *sāmanta* was . . . a ruler distinct alike from a sovereign king and from a governor' with '. . . a dual position of superiority over appointed governors and subordination to the Emperor', by about the eleventh–twelfth century, '. . . the *sāmantas* were no longer a class of subordinate rulers, but virtually a class of privileged nobles enjoying landed properties'.[35]

The term *sāmanta* only symbolically conveys the impression of multiple foci of political authority from the fourth century onward; it may not adequately portray the situation in which the state system had come to embody a really complex hierarchical structure. Such complexity is indicated both by case studies of several early medieval state systems[36] and by analyses of extremely significant material found in early medieval texts like the *Aparājitapṛcchā*, a text written in Gujarat in the twelfth century.[37] In giving details of how palaces were to be built, the *Aparājitapṛcchā* enumerates nine categories of rulers such as *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara, māṇḍalika, mahāsāmanta, sāmanta, laghusāmanta* and so on. In connection with the description of the court of a sovereign ruler, who was a *samrāṭ* holding the titles of *mahārājādhirāja*, and *parameśvara*, the text enjoins that the court ought to be attended on by specific numbers of *maṇḍaleśvaras, māṇḍalikas, mahāsāmantas, sāmantas, laghusāmantas* and *caturaśikas* or lords and rulers of eighty-four villages. If one starts from the lord of the village as the base of the political structure, then the expanse of the hierarchy extending up to the levels of the *mahāsāmantas*

and *mahāmaṇḍaleśvaras* and finally up to the *mahārājādhirāja* was indeed vast. This also makes intelligible the point why such a construct of hierarchy led a school of historians to refer to this structure as composed of 'feudal ranks'[38] and as representing 'feudal polity'.[39]

IV

In a casual remark, attempting to establish a linkage between the new state structure and the new economic order in the initial phase of the period under discussion, Kosambi had asserted: 'Administrative decentralization through *sāmantas* accelerated the conversion of communal property into feudal property.'[40] This direct correlation has a number of implications which however were not clearly spelt out by Kosambi, and, in any case, the growing historiography on the pattern of economy developing from the Gupta period onward has brought out dimensions which have never been discussed before. It is therefore necessary, as we have done in our discussion of the state structure, to identify the key elements in what is considered to be the new pattern of economy, try and understand the processes leading to their appearance and further examine how other features of the economy, suggested by the empirical evidence of the period, relate to these key elements.

It seems that there are, again, two key elements in the new economic order, in the manner in which they are projected in the dominant historiography of the period, and that they are interrelated: (i) the new economic order is dominated by the appearance and exploitative functions of landed intermediaries, (ii) the new pattern of economy, predominantly rural–agrarian in character, centred on self-sufficient village as the unit of production and distribution, and, at the same time, is characterized by agrarian expansion on a substantially large scale. Both points need some elaboration.

The emergence of landed intermediaries and the structural changes this phenomenon brought about in agrarian relations are both taken to be suggested by the growing number of land grants which record transfer of landed properties to various categories of donees.[41] Gifts of land were indeed known in early sources, and later Vedic and Buddhist canonical texts and even, for that matter, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* mentions them. The point, however, has been stressed that whereas the early gifts of land were essentially gifts of resources from the gifted land without disturbing the existing agrarian order, land grants of the Deccan of the Sātavāhana, Kṣatrapa and early Pallava times and then from the Gupta period onward were much more comprehensive in so far as privileges bestowed on the

recipients of grants were concerned. It was this set of privileges which disturbed and finally transformed the existing agrarian order. In order to understand the proposal for a new pattern of economy crystallizing from the Gupta period, it is necessary to dwell on the suggested changes brought about by the practice of land grants.

To summarize varied viewpoints on the practice in the early historical context, land grants were essentially a device for payment for service in which payment in cash became an impossibility because of dwindling money circulation. Second, the practice emerged as a resolution to the crisis which state power had begun to face in keeping the producing social classes under control. Land grants, with administrative-coercive powers geared to surplus extraction from producing classes, were a device to keep the exploitative machinery of the state working.[42]

The privileges bestowed on the recipients of land, which could be given not only by the sovereign king but also by his feudatories, officials and others, were varied, but an average set of privileges would tend to consist of the following: (i) they stipulated enjoyment of different types of resources, the major among which were produce from the land, cash and unpaid labour. In fact, it seems that the range of resources which donees received through land grants became wider in the early medieval period than those of the pre-Gupta and Gupta periods;[42a] (ii) they were permanent or at lest tended to become permanent and by giving ownership rights to the donees, they reduced the original cultivators to the position of tenants who could even suffer eviction, (iii) they further stipulated non-interference from state officials, (iv) by granting legal and administrative immunities, to the extent of permitting donees to impose fines and levy new taxes, they made the donees autonomous and thereby decentralized the authority of the state.

Distinctions are made in historical writings on this period between what are called religious grants and secular grants, and from studies available, it would seem that beginning with grants to Buddhist monasteries, other religious establishments and to individual Brāhmaṇas and Brāhmaṇas in groups, these *devadāna* (that is, 'given to gods') and *brahmadeya* ('given to Brāhmaṇas') grants extended in later centuries to the creation of *agrahāras, śāsanas*, landed estates of temples, *maṭhas* and other types of monastic establishments. Chronologically analysed, the number of such grants and their distribution over space at the pan-Indian level were far more extensive in the early medieval period than in the pre-Gupta and Gupta periods. Secular grants or grants given to officials, kinsmen, merchants, armymen, subordinate rulers and other categories have also been discussed and implications of relevant secular

land grant terms like *bhoga, grāsa, prasāda, vṛtti*, etc[43] analysed in the context of what has been termed the 'Indian feudal formation'. It may be mentioned that in the context of such grants in particular, the paucity of cash in a situation of sluggish money circulation has been emphatically noted, in order to make intelligible the process of land substituting cash as a form of remuneration.

The varied nature of land grants representing a major phenomenon in the agrarian situation has been taken to suggest that while the process of change to a new economic order may not have been as simple as in Kosambi's formulation (that is, conversion of communal property into feudal property through the agency of the *sāmantas*), the practice of land grants nevertheless brought in the layer of intermediaries between the state and the producing classes and this undermined the condition of the peasantry. This 'subjection of the peasantry'[44]—considered to be one key characteristic of early medieval economy—is reflected, it is believed, in: (i) the superior rights given to the grantees making the cultivators subject to their will, (ii) restrictions on their movements, as in many cases cultivators were made over to donees along with land granted to them or were physically attached to monastic estates,[45] (iii) the emergence of *viṣṭi* or forced labour[46] as an important institutional development and the right given to the recipients of land to exact forced labour, and (iv) the wide range of taxes, exactions or levies to which the peasantry was subjected.

Historians writing on early medieval India have in this connection drawn attention to cases of peasant protest, which are mentioned in records from different parts of India. These are considered to have been reactions to the system of peasant oppression, built into the early medieval pattern of economy. These stray but significant cases of localized, rural-level protest are found more in the records of the Deccan and the south;[47] in the context of north India too such protest was not altogether absent. In fact, it is believed that the most major event of this kind is represented by the revolt of the powerful cultivating Kaivartta caste of Bengal, figuring as the central theme in Sandhyākara Nandi's *Rāmacaritam*, a eulogy of Pāla king Rāmapāla. The revolt, caused by oppressive taxation and by the deprivation of the Kaivarttas of their land, was successful to the extent of displacing the sovereign Pāla rulers from power for several years.[48]

The other key feature of the structure of economy is epitomized in the concept of 'the self-sufficient village' which views villages as individually self-sustaining units, devoid of channels connecting them with other

units of production or with centres of commodity exchange.[49] To state the argument in simple terms, the emergence of the village in the early medieval context as a self-sustaining economic unit is traced to the decline of commerce and consequently of commercial groups (represented by such varṇa as Vaiśya) and of urban centres of early historical India. Attempts have been made to document the decline of early historical urban centres which developed in different stages starting from the middle of the first millennium BC by analysing phases of settlement at almost one hundred and thirty sites distributed throughout the subcontinent.[50] The early historical urban centres, of various types, were not only major centres of settlement but were political centres and centres of production and exchange as well. They were further linked with one another through extensive networks of routes. Attempts to analyse the decline of these urban centres, including such major ones as Takṣaśilā in northwest India, Kauśāmbi in the middle Ganga basin and Pāṭaliputra and Campā in the lower half of the middle Ganga basin, in addition to numerous similar major and minor historical settlements in different regions of India, highlight the fact that both in terms of structural activities and other forms of archaeological assemblage, the urban centres reached an apogee of growth in the pre-Gupta period, and their steady decay in Gupta and post-Gupta times naturally had adverse effects on the economy, with the shifting of almost all productive activity to rural areas. This general pattern of 'decay' is in turn attributed to the breakdown in India's profitable long-distance trade with the world dominated by Rome in one direction and by China in the other.

It is therefore suggested that the consequent 'ruralization' and 'localization' of economy, in combination with the emergence of hierarchized layers of landed intermediaries, radically transformed the character of the economy, at least between circa 400 and circa 1000. At one level, the decline of urban centres as settlements of a composite population, of crafts and artisanal production, and of exchange, resulted in migration of both non-producing groups such as Brāhmaṇas as well as artisanal groups to rural areas and to expansion of rural settlements on a considerable scale. Rural expansion, assumed on the basis of references to grants of specific villages or village land to Brāhmaṇas and temples, implied also rural stratification and breakdown of its communal structure. It has been stressed that since transfer of land rights to donees specifically included rights over pastures, forest lands and other items hitherto enjoyed by the village community, land grants completely broke up communal rights[51] and led in many cases to the emergence of substantially

large estates, held individually or on behalf of temples or monasteries. In one sense, therefore, Kosambi's formulation of communal property being transformed into feudal property, although through a differently perceived historical process, appears to be repeated in recent writings as well.

Other dimensions of the economic pattern of the period, circa 400 to circa 1200, follow from the key features discussed above. Since the image of the economy, as it has been generally reconstructed, is that of overall decadence and of sharp stratification, it extended further to the degradation of the economic and corresponding social status of the producing classes in general. If the peasantry was subject, so too were the artisanal groups, and social historians working on the early medieval period point to: (i) the decline in the ritual status of many artisanal groups, this possibly deriving from the fact that artisanal groups were now rurally localized and made subservient to landholding classes[52] and (ii) the lowering of the status of many artisanal groups who now swelled the ranks of the untouchables. In other words, the dominant Brāhmaṇical ideology, which spread in space as a result of land grants to the non-labouring class of Brāhmaṇas, ranked different economic activities ritually and generally regarded artisanal manual labour as impure. While there may have been a great measure of ambivalence regarding such groups as the *rathakāra* since they are found enjoying even high status in early medieval south India,[53] the time-span, circa 600–1200, seems to mark the most crucial phase in the growth of untouchability.[54] It was in this phase that a number of social groups such as the *carmakāra* (leather worker), *rajaka* (washerman), bamboo-worker and basket-maker and new categories of ethnic groups came to be regarded as untouchables.[55] Within the framework of the concept of *varṇasaṃkara*, they were branded as *asat* and *adharmasaṃkara*. It has been mentioned that even the blacksmiths, who were among the important taxpayers of the state till the Gupta period, were listed as *antyajas* by the early medieval period.[56] General degradation of human status, taken as a mark of the condition of feudal decline, seems to have related to other groups too, and one opinion attempts to stress that 'with the rise of the feudal complex in Indian society, trade and traffic (illegal trade) in slaves got an added impetus from the prevailing internal conditions too'.[57]

It needs to be emphasized however that there are many points of variation even within this perception of early medieval economy. One point which may be mentioned as relevant, given the chronological focus of this essay, is that while the time-span roughly from the fourth–fifth to the ninth–tenth centuries is generally looked upon as a period of decline, the

post-1000 span of two centuries is seen to mark the beginnings of departure from the enclosed, rural economy in the forms of crystallization of new networks of exchange, formation of trade guilds and a new phase of money production and circulation. It was because the pattern of economy in the post-1000 phase was perceived to be different from the pattern in the pre-1000 phase that Sharma, writing in 1965, was inclined to take the eleventh–twelfth centuries as marking both the climax as well as the decline of the feudal formation in Indian history. Other opinions differ with regard to the duration of 'Indian feudal formation',[58] and indeed comparatively recent writings within the conceptual framework of Indian feudalism have pointed to the potentialities of growth in rural economy in the overall feudal context.[59] There is thus evidence of agrarian expansion, of technological innovations in irrigation and in the introduction of new crops, of demographic growth and rise in the number of early medieval towns. The historiographical trend has generally been to divide the time-span (400–1200) into two phases, although the division can hardly be expected to correspond to the earlier division of political chronology, between the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.

V

We have so far been trying to underline that historical writings on the period between 400 and 1200 have, in recent times, been dominated by the concept of Indian feudalism, although we should at the same time add that a great volume of writings on this period does not use any conceptual framework at all and does not go beyond compilation of information. The use of the term 'feudalism' has also radically differed in recent writings from the way it was used previously; however, it still largely conforms to the changing image of European feudalism. In other words, despite the use of the term 'Indian feudalism', to posit it as a definitive variant, there have been persistent attempts to find in Indian society and institutions such features as decentralized polity, subject peasantry and serfdom, urban and commercial decline—as well as a subsequent phase of growth—which, taken together, would place Indian feudalism in close proximity to the image of European feudalism. The discussion which we have made so far was directed towards a search for the major characteristics of state and economy which the construct of Indian feudalism has offered and there can be no doubt at all that this construct has both generated a considerable volume of empirical research and underlined the need to search for a framework for social change in Indian history.

Nevertheless, it is in order now to show—with a view to countering

the tendency to turn fruits of recent historical research into axiomatic truths and particularly the facile practice of extending the construct of Indian feudalism to all conceivable contexts—that the notion of Indian feudalism has come up against strong resistance, and mainly on two counts: (i) its inappropriateness for analysing social formation in pre-modern Indian history and (ii) the empirical inaccuracies embedded in the construct. We shall limit our analysis of the critique of Indian feudal formation mainly in so far as it relates directly to writings which are available on state and economy in north India between 400 and 1200.

The major critique of 'Indian feudalism' as a concept appropriate for understanding pre-modern social formation derives from the idea that taking a loose set of attributes to designate a formation as 'feudal' would unhappily and unnecessarily widen the scope of the definition of feudalism and take its key attribute away from it. If 'structured dependence' between lords and peasants, embedded in a specific agrarian production process, was the essence of a feudal formation, then empirical evidence of such dependence in the period when Indian feudalism is believed to have crystallized is considered absent and, in fact, in relation to the production process of the period, the peasantry experienced a considerable measure of freedom. The definition of Indian feudalism is characterized as essentialist, neither meaningfully explaining the real condition of the peasantry in early medieval or medieval India nor linking the two segments of the medieval period in Indian history as understandable progression from one phase to another. Empirically, if land grants created oppressive conditions for the peasantry in the early medieval period, then the equally or more oppressed condition of the peasantry under the Sultanate and later, when such land grants were absent, does not appear intelligible; it also does not appear intelligible how oppressed peasantry in the condition of general economic decadence of the early medieval period remained in a static condition in the medieval period, when the overall structure of economy, vastly commercialized, 'industrialized' and monetized, had gone through radical changes.[60]

So far as writings specific to the period under discussion are concerned, there have been persistent debates among historians over a wide range of issues, particularly those relating to the overall nature of economy of the early medieval period.[61] One set of disputes may be taken to have centred on interpretations of key terms which occur in land-grant inscriptions. It has for example been shown that land grants actually refer to many types of land transfers and not all of them need be taken as examples of grants. Further, the land grants, instead of conferring ownership

to the grantee, may simply have implied transfer of revenue. The same type of controversy extends to examining whether any contractual element was present in the grants, whether land granted can be considered to be of the nature of 'fiefs' of European feudalism and whether the terms used in land-grant inscriptions can justify the way they have been taken to mean transfer of cultivators, artisans and merchants to grantees. Such and other controversies which to an extent derive from the difficulty of finding appropriate English equivalents of the terms used (one such example being *sāmanta*) are, by their very nature, unlikely to be satisfactorily resolved. Similarly, while substantial criticism has been offered against the image of a 'closed, natural' economy, it is equally unlikely that there would be consensus on when economy was more closed and when it was more vibrant with external linkages. It has, for example, been shown that urban centres of early historical India did not all necessarily decline; in fact, in many regions, in addition to many urban centres continuing into the early medieval period, there was a continuing process of the emergence of new urban centres.[62] Similarly, in a recent publication dealing with the monetary history of early medieval north India between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries, it has been argued, on the strength of coin hoard finds, metrology and metal composition, that money production and money circulation in the area between Afghanistan and the middle Ganga basin and between Kashmir and northern Deccan extending to the western coast, were in full spate in the period, and if certain series, because of their unstable metrological and metal standards had only limited circulation, there were other—more stable—series which circulated beyond narrow localities. There were thus both local and interlocal networks of exchange in operation, giving lie to the assumption that post-Gupta economy was a moneyless, closed economy.[63]

The points which both polemical and empirical writings make against the 'Indian feudalism' formulation, particularly with regard to the period 400–1200, generally relate, as we have mentioned earlier, to the pattern of economy that it has reconstructed; there have not been many serious attempts so far to re-examine this 'feudal' postulate of a 'decentralized' state structure in relation to a 'closed, natural economy'. Second, by and large, the critique of this dominant historiography, which characterizes the period under discussion as feudal by identifying a set of attributes, has been essentially of the nature of the negation of these attributes. In other words, there is urgent need both to re-examine: (i) whether the major features which are taken to characterize north Indian state and economy between 400 and 1200 can be interpreted through a perspective

different from the current construct of Indian feudalism, (ii) whether what have been projected as the major features of the period need to be reordered in relation to other features. The point really is not of empirical validity but of seeing which developments can be considered more significant, seen from the perspective of the long-term processes in Indian history. We shall close this last section of the essay with an examination of the construct of Indian feudalism, in so far as it relates to north Indian state and economy, from the point of view of causation, and finally with a statement as to whether it is possible to project an alternative viewpoint regarding the theme from available historical writings. For the purpose of developing the exercise into an argument, it will be necessary to refer again to some of the points discussed earlier.

An examination of Indian feudalism as a dominant historiographical position has to start by asking two interrelated questions: Why did Indian feudalism develop and when? Since opinions of individual historians do vary widely, a search for answers to these questions may be confined to the writings of some major exponents of the 'feudalism' viewpoint and to identifying only the major ideas.

In what we may characterize as the initial phase in the formation of the viewpoint, the origins of political feudalism were perceived as represented by decentralized state structures through the growth of political hierarchy, and in this sense, the proto-feudal phase was located in the pre-Gupta period. The origins of feudal economy were seen in the growth of the practice of land grants with administrative rights, corroding the authority of the state. Even at this stage, the construct suffered from the inconsistency of two irreconcilable parallels: whereas hierarchized polity came to be essentially represented by the growth of the *sāmanta* order, the recipients of land with administrative authority, who could be expected to have corroded the authority of the state and decentralized it, were Brāhmaṇas and religious establishments.

The second idea, which substantially differs from the idea of land grants generating a new social formation but which seeks to provide an explanation for the genesis of the practice, is articulated in the form of a construct of 'social crisis'. This 'social crisis' is presumed to have brought an earlier social formation to an end. The essence of the earlier social formation, which it is necessary to grasp in order to understand the process of the creation of a new formation, is stated in the following terms: 'In spite of the presence of some rich landowners in the Buddhist birth stories, in ancient times we do not find unequal distribution of the chief means of production, i.e., land, on any large scale. We however find

unequal distribution of agricultural products as well as *the forcible use of the labour power of the śūdras* [emphasis added] for the cultivation of land and other purposes. A good portion of the produce of the land went as taxes to the rulers who were called *kṣatriyas*. Another portion went to the *brāhmaṇas* and other religious elements in the form of gifts. For supplying labour to the three higher *varṇas* including the *vaiśya* peasants and merchants, the *śūdras* were considered to be the common source. But really *śūdra* labour seems to have been utilized more by landowning village communities or individuals comprising the *kṣatriyas* and *brāhmaṇas*, who were exempted from taxes. This kind of social formation in which the *vaiśyas* were the principal taxpayers and *śūdras* supplied the main source of labour was *certainly* [emphasis added] riven with contradictions.'[64]

It is believed that these contradictions led to sustained social conflicts. These social conflicts, reflected in the gruesome accounts, in the epics and the Purāṇas originally dating from the pre-Gupta age, of the collapse of the social order in the Kali age,[65] compelled the state to resort to the practice of making land grants because on its own it was incapable of exacting revenues from its subjects. The assumption, in essence, locates the genesis of a new, feudal, social formation in the crisis of state authority caused by social conflicts. The way the social crisis of the Kaliyuga is formulated, by pointing to parallels between Kaliyuga social order and the new, feudal, formation makes it both a cause and content of the new formation, which appears somewhat inadmissible logically. More importantly, unlike in the early medieval period, actual historical events suggesting social conflicts of such magnitude as to cause a crisis of state authority in a period in which early historical urban civilization is believed to have reached its peak, remain so far unrecorded.

Further, social crisis, corresponding to the crisis of state authority, as an explanation for the genesis of a new social formation, appears structurally different from another hypothesis simultaneously advanced. The hypothesis is that '. . . the relapse of a market economy of towns into a subsistence economy of agriculture which followed a widespread decay and desertion of towns from the third Christian century seems to be the key factor in our understanding of the origins of feudalism.'[66] Here too the formulation of the hypothesis suffers from internal inconsistencies,[67] but what needs to be noted is that as an explanatory model, 'urban decay', though implying reduction in the quantum of state's resources, is not the same as persistent social conflicts constituting the collapse of state authority. 'Urban decay', linked to the collapse of long-distance exchange

networks,[68] may be considered 'external' as compared to the 'internal' explanation represented by social conflicts.

Clearly then, there is no satisfactorily structured argument available as yet for the genesis of Indian feudal formation. As we have suggested earlier, the current construct of Indian feudalism appears to continue to subscribe to the assumed binary opposition, incongruously in the early Indian context, between a centralized state and a decentralized state and between an urban market economy and natural economy. In any case, what this construct has bypassed almost totally, in failing to understand their implications for a study of the period 400–1200, are two major processes which characterize Indian history in general: (i) transformation of pre-state society to state society, through what is generally called the process of state formation and (ii) transformation of tribe into peasant and through this transformation, the positioning of its different segments along with other already existing social segments in the hierarchy of the caste system, within the framework of varṇa ideology. It needs further to be stressed that these processes were interrelated and that their operation in any phase of Indian history has to be looked at from the regional perspective since the formation of historical/cultural regions in India derived largely from how these features became major in varying space–time contexts.

It is becoming increasingly evident, through recent writings which attempt to break away from the conventional genealogical and chronological reconstruction, that the period 400–1200 was extremely crucial from the point of view of the formation of local and regional states. Even a recent work which stresses the decline of early urban centres as a necessary background for the emergence of early medievalism, does not fail to note that '. . . the period *c.* 400–650 seems to have been particularly important for the rise of new states or kingdoms. Leaving out the imperial state of the Guptas, in this period we can count sixty-nine states spread all over the country. Out of these, forty-eight could be attributed to Maharashtra, eastern Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Bengal. In a way the area in which these states are found formed a continuous zone with gaps. A good part of the zone was a forested plateau largely included in the Vindhyan region.'[69] There is no need to take the number mentioned as definitive[70] or to think that the process was in operation only between circa 400 and 650 and not later. Similar analyses may give different pictures of the regional distribution of states in other periods. What is important to note is that there is no causal connection between the appearance of these local-level states and the collapse of a

pan-Indian or even a major state structure like the Maurya or Gupta; many of these local states were in fact integrated into the loosely structured Gupta empire. Further, there is nothing to suggest that the appearance of these local states had any connection with the collapse of a pan-Indian urban market economy.

Early historical state formation in India took place around the middle of the first millennium BC,[71] but many of the implications of later-day state formations as a continuing historical process are not as yet clear. It has been shown that new states or new royal lineages could emerge even in areas where states existed previously[72] and that it would be an incorrect procedure to use inscriptional evidence referring to different segments of a ruling lineage to reconstruct unilinear regional royal dynasties.[73] The problem of understanding even the political structure of early medieval or later states therefore still remains quite acute. However, it has been suggested that the emergence of political hierarchy in such open-ended situations may be conceptualized by exploring linkages between stratified local polities and supra-local polities.[74] These linkages may have been of different kinds and their various dimensions include examining the nature of territorial and land control, ranking and even the nature of social network among ruling lineages. Empirical work, done on the origin of the Rajputs in the early medieval period, which shows that different lineages, both of local and non-local origin, appropriated political power and land, in many cases at the expense of local tribal groups, and came to be forged into a cohesive social–political group, would illustrate one kind of regional state formation process in western India from around the seventh century.[75] Most local states or royal lineages formed in this period, however, illustrate a process of change from below, in which monarchical genealogy was formed in a tribal region and from a tribal background. The rise of many ruling lineages from about the fifth century onward, of both short and long durations, in the predominantly tribal areas of Orissa has recently been documented,[76] and these minor states have to be distinguished from the early historical state of Kaliṅga, located in the nuclear region of the Mahanadi basin.[77] Local or regional state formation, from such obscure bases, as a continuous historical process is illustrated not only by the early medieval state of the Candellas of Bundelkhand, presumably from a Gond background, or the ephemeral Chindaka–Nāga lineage in that 'zone of isolation', Bastar, but perhaps more effectively by the late medieval Pudukkottai state of Tondaiman rulers who were of Kallar origin. The Kallars, described as thieves in early Tamil literature and as criminals under the Criminal Tribes Act,

emerged in the late medieval period as a royal caste and as the chief controllers of the resources of the region.[78]

The social mobility implied in the movement of the segment of a tribe towards the formation of a royal genealogy or even the formation of a new state in a nuclear area was closely linked with the problem of legitimation.[79] The emergence of a wide range of ruling elites, conceptualized through the use of such terms as 'Kṣatriyization' and 'Rajputization', explains the close link between the Brāhmaṇical form of monarchical ideology as well as with bhakti ideology and the new states. One excellent example of this, which has been explored in detail, is the growth of the major state structure of the Coḍa–Gaṅgas of Orissa from the eleventh century; its linkage with the cult of Jagannātha which grew into a regional cult and the patronage extended to Brāhmaṇical settlements in early medieval Orissa, are illustrative of a pattern which, despite variations, was all too common throughout early medieval India. The grants of land to Brāhmaṇas and temples, looked at from these perspectives, can then be explained not in terms of the collapse of the state structure but in exactly the opposite way: in terms of the dimension of legitimation of state structure.[80] This is why, although they were present in the early historical period, they became so numerous during Gupta and post-Gupta times. Land grants need not be considered as the major mode of agrarian exploitation either. For one thing, we do not know the percentage of land, in relation to the total cultivable land, held by the grantees at any point of time between 400 and 1200. Second, it is clear that peasantry in many regions like Bengal was already highly stratified in the Gupta and post-Gupta times; this is clear from epigraphical references to such categories as *kuṭumbin, mahattara, mahāmahattara, mahāpradhāna* and so on.[81] In such an already stratified rural society, it would be anachronistic to think in terms of the existence of communal property or communal rights in land and its subsequent breakup because of land grants. Third, the transformation of tribal bases into bases of local or regional states could both marginalize as well as peasantize tribal groups as happened in the case of the Ābhīras, Gurjaras, Bhillas and Meḍas in Rajasthan[82] and would in any case bring in the complexities of a hierarchical caste system in a situation in which the social order was previously kin based.[83] That transformation of tribal groups into peasants did take place, in the early medieval period, is documented, among other regions, for the Brahmaputra valley in Assam where land-grant evidence has been analysed to suggest peasantization of several tribal groups.[84] The significance of this transformation on a wide scale is brought out in the

following analysis of a relevant part of the *Manusmṛti*, which is assigned to a date later than AD 700: 'In order to assimilate numerous aboriginal tribes and foreign elements Manu made a far greater use of the fiction of *varṇa-saṃkara* (intermixture of *varṇas*) than was done by his predecessors. In the majority of instances the mixed castes were lumped with the *śūdras* in respect of their hereditary duties. . . . They pursued their old occupations and were possibly taught new methods of agriculture which gradually turned them into tax-paying peasants.'[85]

One other crucial development of the early medieval period, when looked at from the perspective of regions, may be identified as the emergence of nodes in the form of political centres or exchange centres or both. Epigraphical references to such centres, many of which were definitely of urban dimension, steadily increased from the ninth century, and as in the early historical period, there were hierarchies among them.[86] In regions like Rajasthan and Gujarat, the proliferation of such nodes and linkages between them resulted in intra-regional and interregional movement of resources, and apart from growth in commerce,[87] viewed as an interesting development of this process is the crystallization of a number of merchant lineages in early medieval western India.[88] These developments, in combination with the fact that this was also the initial phase of the formation of Rajput polity, should point to the need to introduce the regional dimension in any analysis of the early medieval period.

The argument which we have been trying to develop from available historical writings, mainly on the theme and the period under discussion, may be expressed in a few points:

(i) The formation of monarchical polities, both local and supra-local, was an important historical process of the period, not necessarily implying decentralization. The major mode of the growth of political hierarchy was the formation of linkages between different levels of polity.

(ii) Grants of land reflected royal legitimation and were not the sole agency for domination in rural society.

(iii) Rural expansion and peasantry formation were processes associated with the emergence of local states. There were stratified peasantries in all nuclear regions by the Gupta period and their ranks swelled, with different degrees of stratification, with the transformation of tribes into peasant castes. Expansion of rural settlements was thus not conditional upon the decline of and demographic movements from towns.

(iv) Subjection of peasantry as a blanket concept, implying the existence of the peasantry as one category and land grantees as exploiters as another, needs to be changed to examining the actual compositions of producing as well as elite groups within the frameworks of state structures. This needs to be done because in the predominantly agrarian states of the period, the two-way linkages between different levels of polity, from the village society to the apex power, could be and were indeed mediated by various groups, including peasant groups, with access to land and power.[89]

Some final comments. Perhaps it should be stressed again that the concept of 'Indian feudalism' broke away not only from conventional methods of history-writing but also, at the same time, from 'Imperialist' and 'Nationalist' assumptions regarding Indian history. In doing so, it not only parted ways with earlier ideologies,[90] but itself took a definitive ideological position.[91] This becomes clear when one juxtaposes Kosambi's stated historical approach to be Marxist with his own rejection of Marx's formulation regarding India.[92] It has been noted earlier that 'Indian feudalism' thus emerged as a method for working out a pattern of social change in early historical India, comparable to what is available from European historiography. However, during the process of empirical research and 'inflation' of the concept, the construct of 'Indian feudalism' has begun to acquire a stereotyped image, particularly in its failure to accommodate long-term dynamics of change in Indian history. The point is: if there is need to look at change in early Indian history, it is necessary that historians too occasionally introduce some change in the way they see the past.

Notes and References

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14. N.R. Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihās* (Ādi Parva), in Bengali, 3rd revised edition in 2 vols (Calcutta, 1980); idem., 'The Medieval Factor'.
15. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956). It must however be underlined that the way Kosambi tried to work out the problem of 'Indian Feudalism' would differ very much from the ways others construct 'Indian Feudalism'. See, for example, his article 'On the Development of Feudalism in India', reprinted in A.J. Syed, ed., *D.D. Kosambi on History and Society: Problems of Interpretation* (University of Bombay, Bombay, 1985). There is indeed an urgent need to analyse Kosambi's scattered ideas on feudalism, in relation to his general ideas about the dynamics of Indian history, instead of simply accepting or rejecting them.
16. See V. Jha, 'Ancient Indian Political History: Possibilities and Pitfalls', *Social Scientist*, vol. 18, nos. 1–2 (2000–1), 1990, pp. 36–54.

17. Among the early works of R.S. Sharma who has been most vigorously researching and elaborating on the widely accepted construct of 'Indian Feudalism' since the 1950s, mention may be made of: (i) 'Origins of Feudalism in India (*c.* AD 400–650)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. I, pt. 3, 1958, pp. 297–328; (ii) 'Landgrants to Vassals and Officials in Northern India *c.* AD 1000–1200', loc. cit., vol. 4, 1961, pp. 70–105; (iii) *Indian Feudalism, c. 300–1200* (Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1965); (iv) *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged (Delhi; 1968), chs. 14–16, 18–19.
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21. R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions*, pp. 253–4.
22. Ibid., p. 255.
23. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction;* 'Indian Feudal Trade Charters', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 2 (1959), p. 284.
24. R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions*, p. 241.
25. D.D. Kosambi, 'Indian Feudal Trade Charters'.
26. R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions*, p. 253.
27. Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973), chs. 4 and 9. Thapar has however reconsidered the nature of the Mauryan state in a number of her later writings: (i) 'The State as Empire', in H.J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, *The Study of the State* (The Hague, 1981, pp. 409–28); (ii) *The Mauryas Revisited* (Calcutta, 1987), ch. I; (iii) *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, revised edition (Delhi, 1997), pp. 310–21.

    See also the essay by G. Fussman, 'Central and Provincial Administration in Ancient India: The Problem of the Mauryan Empire', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 14 (1987–8), pp. 43–72.
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30. Ibid., p. 81.
31. L. Gopal, 'Samanta—Its Varying Significance in Ancient India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1963), pp. 21–37.
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34. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity'.
35. L. Gopal, 'Samanta—Its Varying Significance'; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad, 1973), ch. 3.
36. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, chs. 2 and 5.
37. R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes in Early Medieval India circa* AD *500–1200* (Delhi, 1969); R. Inden, 'Hierarchies of Kings in Early Medieval India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, vol. 15 (1981), pp. 99–125.
38. R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes in Early Medieval India*.
39. For relevant discussions, see B.P. Majumdar, *Socio-Economic History of Northern India (*AD *1030–1194)*; R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*; R.K. Choudhary, 'Some Historical Aspects of Feudalism in Ancient India Down to the 14th century AD, Based Mainly on Epigraphic Sources', *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 38, pts. 1–3 (1960); J.N. Asopa, *Feudalism in North India (*AD *700–1200)*, Jaipur (n.d.); L. Gopal, 'On Feudal Polity in Ancient India', *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 41, pt. 2 (1963), pp. 405–13; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad, 1973). For recent studies of material from western India and the Deccan, see V.M. Jha, 'Feudal Elements in the Caulukya State: An Attempt at Relocation', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India*, pp. 212–47; Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (Delhi, 1993); R.N. Nandi, *State Formation, Agrarian Growth and Social Change in Feudal South India* (Delhi, 2000). For a defence of feudalism framework for the study of the state in early medieval India, see R.S. Sharma, 'The Segmentary State and the Indian Experience', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order*, pp. 137–78.
40. D.D. Kosambi, 'Indian Feudal Trade Charters', p. 284.
41. R.S. Sharma, 'Origins of Feudalism in India'; *Indian Feudalism*, passim; 'How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?' *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 12, nos. 2–3 (Special Issue edited by T.J. Byres and H. Mukhia) (London, 1985), pp. 19–43.
42. R.S. Sharma, 'Problems of Peasant Protest in Early Medieval India', *Social Scientist*, vol. 16, no. 9 (184) (1988), pp. 3–16. See also idem., *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation* (Kolkata, 2001), ch. 7.

42a. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy*.

43. R.S. Sharma, 'Landgrants to Vassals and Officials in Northern India'; K.K. Gopal (i) 'Feudal Composition of Army in Early Medieval India', *Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society*, vol. 28, pts. 3–4 (1962–3), pp. 30–49; (ii) 'Assignments to Officials and Royal Kinsmen in Early Medieval India (*c.* AD 700–1200)', *University of Allahabad Studies* (Ancient History Section) (1963–4), pp. 75–103; (iii) 'The Assembly of the Samantas in Early Medieval India', *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 42, pt. 1 (1964), pp. 241–50;

B.N.S. Yadava (i) 'Secular Landgrants of the Post-Gupta Period and Some Aspects of the Growth of Feudal Complex in Northern India', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *Land-system and Feudalism in Ancient India* (Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1966), pp. 72–94; (ii) *Society and Culture of Northern India. . .*

44. For relevant discussions, see R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*; idem., 'How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?', B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture. . .*; idem., 'Immobility and Subjection of Indian Peasantry in Early Medieval Complex', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. I, pt. I (1974), pp. 18–27; idem., 'Problems of Interaction between Socio-Economic Classes in the Early Medieval Complex', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 3, pt. I (1976), pp. 43–58; idem., 'The Problem of the Emergence of Feudal Relations in Early India', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 41st session, Bombay, 1980; I. Habib, 'The Peasant in Indian History', General President's Address, Indian History Congress, 43rd session, Kurukshetra, 1982; H. Mukhia, 'Was there Feudalism in Indian History?' *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1981), pp. 273–310; idem., 'Peasant Production and Medieval Indian Society', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 12, nos. 2–3 (1985), pp. 228–50.
45. L. Gopal, 'Quasi-Manorial Rights in Ancient India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 6 (1963), pp. 296–308.
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47. D.N. Jha, 'Early Indian Feudalism: A Historiographical Critique', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 40th session, Waltair, 1979; R.N. Nandi, 'Growth of Rural Economy in Early Feudal India', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 45th session, Annamalai, 1984; R.S. Sharma, *Early Medieval Society*, ch. 7.
48. R.S. Sharma, 'Problems of Peasant Protest in Early Medieval India'.
49. D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*; R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*. Stress on ruralization, implying that society was urban in character at a previous stage, is also to be found in R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*.
50. R.S. Sharma, 'Decay of Gangetic Towns in Gupta and Post-Gupta Times', *Journal of Indian History*, Golden Jubilee Volume (1973), pp. 135–50. For elaboration on empirical details and changes consequent upon urban decay, see R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*.
51. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*; idem., *Urban Decay*.
52. For the suggestion that this led to the appearance of *jajmani* type of relations in rural society, see R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay*.
53. V. Jha, 'Status of the Rathakara in Early Indian History', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 34th session, Chandigarh, 1973, pp. 104–11.

54. V. Jha, 'Stages in the History of the Untouchables', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (1975), pp. 14–31; Suvira Jaiswal, 'Some Recent Theories of the Origin of Untouchability: Historiographical Assessment', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39th session, Hyderabad, 1978, pp. 124–36.
55. V. Jha, 'Position and Status of Bamboo-workers and Basket-makers in Ancient and Early Medieval Times', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39th session, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1978, pp. 230–40; idem., 'Leatherworkers in Ancient and Early Medieval India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 40th session, Waltair, 1979, pp. 99–108.
56. A.P. Ojha, 'Blacksmiths in Ancient and Early Medieval India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 40th session, Waltair, 1979, pp. 159–62.
57. O.P. Srivastava, 'Slave Trade in Ancient and Early Medieval India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 39th session, Hyderabad, 1978, pp. 124–36.
58. See D.N. Jha, 'Early Indian Feudalism: A Historiographical Critique'; see also discussions in H. Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?'; idem., 'Peasant Production and Medieval Indian Society'.
59. R.N. Nandi, 'Growth of Rural Economy in Early Feudal India'; R.S. Sharma, 'How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?', idem., *Urban Decay in India*.
60. For articulating this line of criticism see H. Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History', however, for other views, see T.J. Byres and H. Mukhia, eds, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 12, nos. 2–3 (1985).
61. See, for example, the writings of D.C. Sircar, (i) 'Landlordism Confused with Feudalism', in D.C. Sircar, ed., *Land-system and Feudalism in Ancient India* (University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1966), pp. 57–61; (ii) *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India as Revealed by Epigraphical Records* (University of Lucknow, Lucknow, 1969); (iii) *The Emperor and the Subordinate Rulers* (Visvabharati, Santiniketan, 1982). For response from R.S. Sharma, see 'Indian Feudalism Retouched', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1974), pp. 320–30.
62. See B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and Urban Centres in Early Medieval North India', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1974), pp. 203–19; 'Urban Centres in Early Medieval India: An Overview', in S. Bhattacharyya and Romila Thapar, eds, *Situating Indian History* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 8–33.
63. John S. Deyell, *Living without Silver: The Monetary History of Early Medieval North India* (Delhi, 1990); B.N. Mukherjee, 'Commerce and Money in the Western and Central Sectors of Eastern India (*c.* AD 750–1200), *The Indian Museum Bulletin*, vol. 17 (1982), pp. 65–83; idem., *Media of Exchange in Early Medieval North India* (Delhi, 1992). For the analysis of the problem from a different perspective, see R.S. Sharma, 'Metal Money in India (*c.* 500–*c.* 1000)', Third Nathanie Memorial Lectures (Indian Museum,

Calcutta, 1988), unpublished manuscript; idem., *Early Medieval Indian Society*, ch. 4. Also K.M. Shrimali, 'Early Indian Coins and Economic History: Trends and Prospects', in Devendra Handa, ed., *Ajaya Śrī* (Ajay Mitra Sastri Felicitation Volume), vol. I (Delhi, 1989), pp. 237–51; idem., 'Monetization in a Coastal Economy: The Case of Konkan under the Śilāhāras', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order*, pp. 345–84.

64. R.S. Sharma, 'Problems of Peasant Protest in Early Medieval India', *Social Scientist*, vol. 16, no. 9 (1984), pp. 3–16.
65. B.N.S. Yadava, 'The Accounts of the Kali Age and the Social Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 5, nos. 1–2 (1979), pp. 31–64; R.S. Sharma, (i) *Śūdras in Ancient India (A Social History of the Lower Order down to circa* AD *600)*, 2nd revised edition (Delhi, 1980); (ii) 'The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis', in S.N. Mukherjee, ed., *India: History and Thought* (Essays in Honour of A.L. Basham) (Calcutta, 1982), pp. 186–203; (iii) *Early Medieval Indian Society*, ch. 2.
66. R.N. Nandi, 'Growth of Rural Economy in Early Feudal India', p. 3.
67. Note, for example, the chronologically unclear points made in the two following statements on the same page in a work which deals with the problem of urban decay in early India: (i) 'The six hundred years following the third century saw the expansion of the self-sufficient village and the contraction of the urban sector dominated by crafts and commerce' (R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, p. 177). (ii) 'In the first part of the early Middle Ages (*c.* 600–1000) two distinct trends can be discerned. One is the contraction of towns, and the other is the extension of villages' (ibid.). Read the above two statements in combination with the following: 'The second phase of the urban decay appears after the sixth century, and its beginning synchronizes with the fall of the Gupta empire. This phase was not so widespread as the first one' (ibid., p. 181).
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 168.
70. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity'; J.G. De Casparis, 'Inscriptions and South Asian Dynastic Tradition', in R.J. Moore, ed., *Tradition and Politics in South Asia* (Delhi, 1979).
71. See Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State (Social Formations in the Mid-First Millennium* BC *in the Ganga Valley)* (Delhi, 1984); R.S. Sharma, (i) *Origin of the State in India* (University of Bombay, Bombay, 1989); (ii) *The State and Varṇa Formation in the Mid-Ganga Plains (An Ethno-archaeological View)* (Delhi, 1996).
72. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity'.
73. D.P. Henige, 'Some Phantom Dynasties of Early and Medieval India: Epigraphic Evidence and the Abhorrence of a Vacuum', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 38, pt. 3 (1975), pp. 525–49.
74. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity'.

75. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan', in *The Making of Early Medieval India*.
76. Upinder Singh, *Kings, Brāhmaṇas and Temples in Orissa, An Epigraphic Study, AD 300–1147* (Delhi, 1993).
77. S. Seneviratne, 'Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State Formation in Early India', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 7, nos. 1–2 (1980–1), pp. 54–69.
78. N.B. Dirks, 'The Original Caste: Power, History and Hierarchy in South Asia', in McKim Marriott, ed., *India Through Hindu Categories (Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Occasional Papers, 5) (New Delhi, 1990), pp. 59–77.
79. See H. Kulke (i) 'Kshatriyization and Social Change: A Study in Orissa Setting', in S.D. Pillai, ed., *Aspects of Changing India: Studies in Honour of Professor G.S. Ghurye* (Bombay, 1976), pp. 398–409; (ii) 'Early State Formation and Royal Legitimation in Late Ancient Orissa', in M.N. Das, ed., *Sidelights on the History of Orissa* (Cuttack, 1977), pp. 104–14; (iii) 'Royal Temple Policy and the Structure of Medieval Hindu Kingdoms', in A. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G.C. Tripathi, eds, *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 125–38; (iv) 'Fragmentation and Segmentation versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Feudalism and the Segmentary State in Indian History', *Studies in History*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 237–63; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, (i) 'Origin of the Rajputs'; (ii) 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity'.
80. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity'. It is interesting that David Shulman, who is not directly concerned with the problem of early medieval state and economy, has come up with the following statement: '. . . however much the Brahmin may vaunt his purity and independence, his historical reality is one of constant compromise—above all through the acceptance of royal gifts. The vast numbers of landgrants to the Brahmins throughout the South, right up to the beginning of the modern period, attest to the strength of this pattern and to the royal need for Brahmin legitimization which underlay it,' David Shulman, 'The Enemy Within: Idealism and Dissent in South Indian Hinduism,' in *Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and Dissent in India*, ed. by S.N. Eisenstadt, *et al.* (Mouton Publishers, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, 1984), p. 16.
81. T. Yamazaki, 'Some Aspects of Landsale Inscriptions in Fifth and Sixth Century Bengal', *Acta Asiatica* (Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture), no. 43 (Tokyo, 1982), pp. 17–36; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India* (Calcutta, 1990), ch. 2.
82. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Political Processes and Structure of Polity', *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society*, ch. 3.
83. This process too has to be viewed as a long-term one, and the following statement, despite its sounding like a cliché, should be of some relevance to

the early medieval context: 'The process of transformation of tribal groups into castes is the passage from equality to hierarchy,' Robert Deliége, *The Bhils of Western India* (New Delhi, 1985), Preface.

84. N. Lahiri, 'Landholding and Peasantry in the Brahmaputra Valley, *c.* 5th–13th centuries AD', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 33 (1990), pp. 157–68.
85. R.S. Sharma, *Studies in Ancient India (A Social History of the Lower Order down to circa AD 600)*, 2nd revised edition (Delhi, 1980), pp. 240–1 and Appendix I.
86. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and Urban Centres in Early Medieval North India', and 'Urban Centres in Early Medieval India: An Overview', both in *The Making of Early Medieval India*.
87. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Markets and Merchants in Early Medieval Rajasthan', in *The Making of Early Medieval India*; V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India (AD 1000–1300)* (Delhi, 1990).
88. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Markets and Merchants'.
89. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India*, ch. 2; for south India, see Kesavan Veluthat, 'Landed Magnates as State Agents: The Gavundas under the Hoysalas in Karnataka', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Golden Jubilee Session, Gorakhpur, 1989, pp. 118–23.
90. P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1979), pp. 462–549; B. O'Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism and Indian History* (Oxford, 1989), ch. 7.
91. R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990).
92. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*.

CHAPTER 13

Cultural Plurality, Contending Memories and Concerns of Comparative History: Historiography and Pedagogy in Contemporary India*

I. Some Preliminary Points

Even at the risk of reiterating the obvious I would like to begin this essay by stressing that historical thinking has always been at the crossroads and historical thinking has never been either culturally homogeneous or unilineal. For the purpose of what I shall try to argue in this essay, the dynamics and the heterogeneity inherent in the acts of reconstructing, and of the writing of history, need to be stressed at the outset, if only because it is sometimes assumed that history-writing either tends to conform to cultural patterns or is divisible only in recognized and acknowledged chronological terms. A few initial points to start with are these. First, what the domain of history is has not really ever been rigidly defined. It is not only since Marc Bloch and Lucien Fevre most effectively broke down some of its time-honoured but artificial barriers that history has become open-ended; the two father-figures of what is generally known as the mainstream of Western history-writing tradition, namely, Herodotus and Thucydides, represent heterogeneity within what is perceived as a broadly homogeneous cultural tradition.[1] Second, what qualify as the features of history? The conviction with which historians set about their task with defined sources ranging from archaeological to archival, with a sense of certainty as to what constituted history, has been subjected to legitimate doubts, although it ought to be kept

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in mind that the craft of an innovative historian always demanded deviation from the comforts of an established norm and format. It has, in relation to the scenario today, been rightly pointed out: 'One thing is clear: the paradigms that have governed historical and literary study since the nineteenth century no longer hold unquestioned sway. The confident, humanist belief that a rational, "objective" investigation of the past permits us to recover "authentic" meanings in historical texts have come under severe attack . . . At stake in this debate are a number of concepts traditionally deployed by historians in their attempts to understand the past: causality, change, authorial intent, stability of meaning, human agency and social determination.'[2] It is not that methods of source criticism did not exist earlier; today, however, the historians' sources of information, as texts, are essentially suspect as sources for the representation of reality. There are therefore persistent pleas for shift from universality to fragments, or as Peter Burke has put it, from 'the ideal of the Voice of history to that of heteroglossia'.[3] It has been stressed that even if the result is a 'discourse that is itself fragmentary, it is redundant to make apologies for it'.[4]

The points following from the above relate to the theme of the conference, and to my essay in particular, in the following way. The expansion of the frontiers of history-writing—which is also linked up with the question of which dimensions of the past are perceived as relevant for communication—has, for long, also been seen as reflecting human history in general. This concern, I may point out, does not necessarily relate to a search for universal laws or straitjacket patterns; this concern can be seen as embedded in attempts at conceptualization of what were perceived as cutting across histories of different segments of humanity. I think I can cite, in comparatively recent times, concepts of 'Comparative History'[5] and of 'Social Evolution'[6] as two examples of such attempts to take history beyond cultures. However, when one comes across stress on 'fragments' as legitimate contestants in the arena of history, or across 'cultural difference' in the context of historical thinking, one is propelled into rethinking comparative concerns and asking instead: is history culture specific and, if it is, how is culture-specific history likely to be constructed and transmitted, particularly for the purpose of pedagogy?

II. Cultural Spaces and Cultural Boundaries

If history is culture specific, then it can be assumed that one must begin by looking for cultural boundaries to which historical thinking will relate and to which patterns of history will correspond. One is of course aware

of the notions of cultural bipolarities which are as much parts of historical thinking as stereotyped heuristic designs for construction and communication of history. In one such notion, that of 'Orientalism', the Orient is a specific subject of representation. As James Clifford puts it: '. . . the Orient is "textualized"; its multiple, divergent stories and existential predicaments are coherently woven as a body of signs susceptible of virtuoso reading. This Orient, occulted and fragile, is brought lovingly to light, salvaged in the work of the outside scholar. The effect of domination in such spatial/temporal deployments . . . is that they confer on the other a discrete identity, while also providing the knowing observer with a standpoint from which to see without being seen, to read without interruption.'[7]

The image of the Orient, in its contrast with what constitutes the 'unobserved' but implicitly categorized culture of the Occident, and as representing a key bipolarity in relation to the constitution and communication of cultural images, is, for several reasons, relevant for the present discussion: (i) it is an essential ingredient in a hegemonic colonial construction of the history and culture of a colony, and although the colony does not exist anymore as a colony, its life as a mode of historical thinking has not come to an end with the end of the colony. In other words, it survives as a historical cultural stereotype beyond the context of its historical origins and gets transmitted in some post-colonial, sophisticated versions; (ii) the opposition to Western perceptions in the indigenous discourse in whatever form—perception of antediluvian national history, cultural nationalism or even stress on subalternism—continues to use Orientalism as a reference point; (iii) the Orient–Occident bipolarity, as legitimizing the notion of bipolarity, may be duplicated at different levels and down the scale. However, whether it is such broad bipolarities alone which accommodate a tremendous range of possible culture spaces is a problem which I shall have to take up later.

To return to the notion of bipolarity as it continues to relate to constructions of cultural differences, let me reproduce extracts from two comparatively recent works; the extracts, unfortunately, may not do justice to the academic quality of the works from which they are taken. They nevertheless represent an attitude which lies embedded in the thought about the 'other'; both therefore are statements of what are perceived as genuine differences and therefore reinforce bipolarity.

I first refer to Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty's work titled *Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities*[8]; the study is culture specific in its attempt to understand meanings of textual references in India, particularly references from one text, to dreams and illusion. Here is what constitutes its starting

point. O'Flaherty refers to two kinds of common sense in the West, Platonic and Empiricist, and points out that Westerners are constrained to choose one or the other. O'Flaherty goes on to write: 'In India, too, there are two modes of common sense: common sense A (*saṃsāra*—linked, and materialistic) and common sense B (*mokṣa*—linked, and idealistic). But Indians are often able to hold both kinds of common sense in their heads at once and to reconcile both kinds with perceptions of their lives. In the West, only a gaggle of professional metaphysicians or fanatics will have enough genuine familiarity with such ideas to be able to internalize them and act on them instinctively, *but Indian children learn about metaphysics as Western children learn about sex, on the street* (emphasis added).

My other reference would be to Madeliene Biardeau's *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*,[9] the title of the work implying that the civilization which is being referred to, if it is Indian, has to be viewed essentially in terms of Hinduism. The civilization thus has one source; it can therefore be represented as the other. In fact, in the Introduction, Biardeau begins by confessing that an attempt 'to present a unified account of a culture and a history as vast as that of India, explicitly linking each part to a single totality, is no doubt a somewhat reckless undertaking. Would anyone dare to define a unit of the same kind within Western Civilization, still less presume to embrace the whole of western history in a single synthesis governed by a few simple norms that can be traced everywhere?' And yet, 'India is . . . a particularly favourable case for an undertaking of this sort', the main reason being that India does not have a history. 'This amounts to saying that change, when it does appear, is only superficial and always refers back to a normative foundation, the one source from which spring the most transient phenomena. It is then a question of adopting this language as far as one can, of entering into this world-view, forgetting one's own categories so as to discover those of the other, accepting that its lines of cleavage are not ours, that its values are distributed in a way that for us is unexpected. Such a perspective in fact does no more than reconnect with the very modern and very western preoccupations of the historians of "mentalities".'

I have had to reproduce here these rather lengthy extracts because, in my understanding, they quite forcefully illustrate the continuity of the notion of an essential bipolarity between the Occident and the Orient, imbuing it with the strength of an axiom which remains a dominant feature of historical thinking about India's past. What is additionally, and perhaps more radically significant, is that this assumption, deriving from the

West's perception of the East, is absorbed even in the notions which the indigenous response prepared as its defence against being perceived as the different 'other', in the context of its colonial experience. Thus, when one encounters the notion of Indian 'exceptionalism', there is perhaps no alternative to regarding it as another expression of the assumption of cultural bipolarity, which is a part of essentially Orientalist assumptions. Let me dilate on this a little more. It has been argued recently[10] that although India's struggle for freedom has been viewed practically only in political terms so far, the real resistance was in the form of the construction of a sovereign domain which was cultural and in which the colonial regime was not conceded any space to intervene. Whereas the colonial state wielded sovereign power over the material domain, the colony reserved for itself the domain which is spiritual, and thus, non-material, and cultural. Thus, 'this domain of sovereignty, which nationalism thought of as the "spiritual" or "inner" aspects of culture, such as language, or religion or the elements of personal and family life, was of course premised upon a difference between the culture of the colonizer and the colonized. The more nationalism engaged in its contest with the colonial power in the other domain of the politics, the more it insisted on displaying the marks of "essential" cultural difference so as to keep out the colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it.'[11] However, it can be effectively argued that at least the nationalistic vision of the past, in the way it was being constructed in opposition to the material domination by the colonizers, was not really as schizophrenic as it is made out to be; the vision developed into that of an ideal, integrated world—both material and spiritual—which however was lost; the lost world was what could measure its strength with the colonial state. One must keep it in mind that Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*[12], with its perceived vision of a model sovereign state, or the ancient Hindu 'colonies' of Southeast Asia[13] represented equally powerful dimensions of this lost world. In other words, the lost world was a mirror image of what the colonized perceived the colonial sovereignty to represent.

From the historiography of our times, it however appears that the nationalist vision of India's past could not have been as homogeneous as it is sometimes made out to be, and the reason, in one sense, may be that there were parallel and conflicting (or what are perceived as parallel and conflicting) stands in the freedom struggle itself. So here we have to shift from intercultural perception of differences to what is essentially intra-cultural; if the anti-colonial struggle was not homogeneous, then the image of the lost world was not undifferentiated either. Let us see how

this particular bipolarity within India's struggle for freedom is initially stated: 'The historiography of Indian nationalism has long been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India.'[14] The suggested bipolarity of Elite versus Subaltern does not set us rethinking only about how we view our immediate past of anti-colonial struggle but also our pre-colonial past as well, because 'far from being destroyed or rendered virtually ineffective, as was elite politics of the traditional type by the intrusion of colonialism, it continued to operate vigorously in spite of the latter, adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under the Raj and in many respects developing entirely new strains in both form and content. As modern as indigenous elite politics, it was distinguished by its relatively *greater depth in time as well as in structure*' (emphasis added).[15]

I have been trying to argue that historical thinking and history construction, even in relation to what is perceived as a culturally bounded space like India, can thus neither be homogeneously Occidental, nor homogeneously indigenous; the 'breakdown of the totalizing claims of a nationalist historiography' is thus inconsistent with the plea or the project for autonomous space for indigenous imagination.[16] To resolve this inconsistency what the project must answer is: what is archetypically indigenous?

III. Intercultural and Intra-cultural in the Construction and Communication of Contending Memories

If, contrary to what is normally heuristically conceived, India does not constitute a homogeneous cultural space, then what pluralities are articulated in Indian historical thinking? One must begin here by underlining that historical thinking in India did not originate in response to, nor was stimulated by, colonial construction of its past. And one cannot talk of one mode of pre-colonial historical thinking and history construction either. I am not really entitled to refer with any degree of competence to tribal and folk traditions of orally transmitted memories in India, but they are nevertheless important in their own spatial and specific cultural contexts. At the same time, they relate to general, trans-cultural patterns of transmitting what tribal or folk groups consider as memories of their past and, specifically, to the way these memories contest certain assumptions underlying the classical Brāhmaṇical mode or any other dominant

mode of recording the past.[17] Within the classical tradition too there is wide space for disagreement between how the Buddhists, the Jainas and the Brāhmaṇas highlighted different, often contending elements, in preserving what seemed significant to their different modes of thinking,[18] but since I am not concerned with details of this, I shall briefly refer to the Brāhmaṇical mode and its key elements, as in the classical tradition itself, the Brāhmaṇical mode of thought and method of recording history in some ways started gaining ascendancy. I would consider three interrelated elements as key elements in this mode: (i) Myth of Creation and its extension into human history; (ii) Genealogy construction, and (iii) Preservation of social order. The interrelatedness of these three elements is perhaps best symbolized in the figure of Manu. The figure of Manu bridges creation with human history; he remains at the apex level in all major efforts at genealogy construction. This genealogy is not sacred but temporal, but genealogy construction extends over to hagiography as well, and genealogy is seen as an essential precondition for any individual or any social group desiring a recognizable social status for passage to preserved memory. Manu's association with the preservation of social order is evident in that the relevant major *Dharmaśāstra*, codifying this order, derives from him, as the codes themselves are perceived to have been ordained by him. I would like to think that the essence of the Brāhmaṇical mode of preserving memory is vitally related to its device of legitimation, and it continued as a possibility that the device of legitimation, in various forms, could be taken recourse to even in most recent phases of Indian history, notwithstanding the growth of different other modes of historical writing over centuries, and, also in what is seen as the modern phase of history-writing through exposure to the non-indigenous mode.

If one is looking for the existence of cultural plurality in contemporary historical thinking, it, however, has to be located not within the Brāhmaṇical mode but has to be related to the way the nineteenth-century intelligentsia reacted to the historical assumptions of the politically sovereign colonial power. I have already briefly argued against the recent view that the reaction to the fact of being ruled was to construct a sovereign domain of culture. The bifurcation of what was perceived as a nation projected into a remote past, is artificial; despite oft-articulated accent on the spiritual culture of the East in contrast to the West's material culture, the historical vocabulary that was being used was consistently colonial and, if not by design, at least in attempts to achieve approximation with the sovereign power, the major attributes of that power were being

looked for in the past. Hence the search, both for the institution of democracy as well as a centralized, bureaucratic state in ancient India, and the academic rediscovery of the 'colonies' which had once constituted the 'Greater India'.[19] This 'Golden Age' which was lost was obviously located in the past, and the point that this view of the past did not radically depart from the colonial schema seems tenable when one considers two interrelated issues—which will prove to be highly significant pedagogic issues as well— (i) that of the pre-colonial state and (ii) of periodization. It was these issues, and others deriving from them, which decided in a large measure how the cultural plurality or diversity of India was to be treated in history and how the material would be incorporated into a system of pedagogic communication.

The periodization of pre-colonial India into Hindu and Muslim[20] found acceptance with other notions corresponding to it, namely that the replacement of Hindu rule brought an end to one period of history and brought in another. There is nothing exclusively cultural about this periodization; the perception of the loss of one's political sovereignty, and therefore of one's past, through the process of the imposition of another sovereignty, was common to what came to characterize both Hindu and Muslim historical thinking, the only difference being that they related obviously differently to the perceived distinction, between Hindu and Muslim, in this periodization schema.

The notion of the glorious past which was lost and which needed to be retrieved constituted an urgent plea for the writing of one's lost history, and here one finds that there could be different spaces for highlighting and articulation of one's own cultural affiliations; the plea for national history could therefore be quite contentious. When Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, considered to be a pioneer thinker in the context of India's growing cultural nationalism of the nineteenth century, made the emotive plea for the writing of Bengal's national history or the true history of the Bengali *jāti*, he sought to make the plea stronger by commenting. 'Even the Oriyas have their history.'[21]

The agenda for the writing of nationalist history could thus operate at two levels, not necessarily complementary. 'Region', not academically defined, but in essence taken as representing a nation (*jāti*) within a nation (*jāti*) by identification with the dominant community resident in it became a legitimate component of the enterprise of writing national history. This again is not a legacy of the pre-colonial mode of historical thinking or history-writing; it is derived from the way the response of the

ruled under a colonial regime was being given shape by the English-educated intelligentsia which was familiar with the vocabulary of the history they encountered.

I need to highlight the following points from the discussion above in order to be able to move on to the section that I shall be developing now: (i) despite often offering severe critiques of the colonial regime but, at the same time, often endorsing colonial rule, the historical thinking that was shaping up from the nineteenth century differentially constructed the images of a past which was lost but which could be retrieved; hence, history construction can also be seen in relation to the vision of positive political action; (ii) the pioneers in historical reconstruction related this lost past with what they perceived as their own cultural roots, most noticeably in the form of making pleas for the writing of the history of the regions or communities with which they culturally as well as politically identified themselves, even if this identification was an imposition of the present into the past. From the point of view of what I have called culture-specific history, this *identification in retrospect* is important, and I would like to cite here a statement about the relevant sensitivity of the Muslims of the subcontinent, since the statement relates to a perceived homogeneous Muslim history of the subcontinent, of which the author felt, he was a part. I.H. Qureshi's *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent*,[22] although written after partition, articulates this homogeneity, despite the fact that there were many key elements of difference within the community, as a preface to a political vision: 'The Muslim community of the subcontinent has been treated as if it were only an irrelevant inconvenience, a mere obstruction in the even flow of events, a nuisance which raised its head at awkward moments. There has been little desire to understand the historical background of the emotions which have swayed the community in its great decisions. When nationalism began to stir the hearts of the inhabitants of the subcontinent, it was taken for granted that since all of them lived in a common habitat, they would have the same desire for national unity; it was expected of the Muslims that they would dutifully reconcile themselves completely with the Indian nation. Such hopes were built upon the most deplorable ignorance of the psychology of the Muslim community, of the thinking of its leaders and masses, and of the history of its origins, development and integration. When history asserted itself and the Muslims claimed to be a nation, many were surprised and not a few even scandalized.' This 'assertion of history' in the middle of the twentieth century is projected as being

derived from an integrated community of the past, which too had lost its political sovereignty and was now retrieving it through the 'assertion of history'.

IV. Pedagogy and Communication of Images of the Past

There obviously are various ways in which images of India's past are communicated, and this communication is not necessarily limited to agencies located in India or rooted in Indian culture. Even within India, the range of modes must be very wide, considering that the manner in which the bewilderingly multiple images of India's past get orally transmitted to an audience committed to a set of beliefs must be vastly different from the way in which the image of India is sought to be made commercially and selectively attractive to prospective consumers.[23] Both again would be different from 'academic' communication in classroom situations which may themselves be heterogeneous. However, I am here not concerned with varieties of communication but with varieties of Indian history within classroom situations themselves. This is not to say that other channels of communication are less important—in fact, other channels are likely to assume greater importance in future, because of what is communicated in often unexciting narrations of historical events in classrooms. For the moment, however, prescribed syllabi still wield, so far as the 'Voice of History' is concerned, a substantial measure of authority in the formal system of education,[24] and I shall now take up only this aspect of communication, since, in my understanding, what is thus communicated does not seem to explicate cultural difference but rather congealed stereotypes with their roots going back to essentially one source: the colonial premises and their adaptations. I would therefore try to explain the continuity of the stereotypes by not only pointing to the ever-increasing gap, a very real absence of communication, between those who are involved in the writing of history and those who are its key communicators, but also take up the stereotypes themselves.

For this enquiry in depth, it will be necessary to go through a vast corpus of material prescribed as textbooks throughout the country, and this is beyond the scope of my enterprise. For a preliminary understanding, I have depended on two types of material: (i) a review, conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in India and compiled in two parts, of school-level history textbooks prescribed and sometimes officially commissioned, in seven different states of India[25] and (ii) supplementary reading material on Indian culture, not

always as a part of regular, prescribed syllabus, but sometimes also determining the contents of what is taught within the approved perspective of education.[26]

Without going into details of the contents of the prescribed syllabi and the manner in which textbooks get prepared in the different states covered by the NCERT survey, I shall be using the findings of the survey to understand certain key motifs of Indian history which is taught at various levels and try and relate them to the other points raised in this essay.

It needs to be noted, as a preliminary point, that *there is an implicit and sometimes expressed premise regarding what the teaching of history should mean*; it has therefore an objective, which is sometimes stated to be *experiencing the pride of nationalism and patriotism through the study of history*. One thus comes across such a statement as this in a textbook, commissioned and prepared by the Government of Uttar Pradesh: '. . . the history of the past of a country enables it to defend its existence, its national unity and in making a proud political place for itself in the contemporary world'; the teaching of history is thus intended to ensure that 'inspired by its proud past, any country can make its future a similarly proud one'.[27]

The linking of the writing and teaching of history with the objective of generating a feeling of national solidarity and pride derives, one can presume, from the earlier nationalist perception of history and history's connection with national and cultural identity. Nation as a given entity, representing an image of unity in diversity and the key reference point for history-writing, then has to continue giving rise to variations on certain motifs, which will pertain to the notion of the nation, and has to ensure their incorporation into textbooks. Two motifs which appear to be common, despite the difference in the ways they are projected, are: (i) the motif of invasions and invaders and (ii) the motif of heroes, both national and regional, who represent unity in diversity. Invasions and invaders, implying fixed territorial borders of the nation projected into the past, relate to various patterns and phases of Indian history. The culture of the country declines or its citizens put up heroic national resistance when invaders attack; there being a correlation between invasions and phases of decline, invaders have either to be absorbed or they remain outsiders, although contemporary sources may not have used the term 'outsiders' in relation to them. Defeat at the hands of invaders is national humiliation; one can thus see the device, of course in some extreme cases alone, of setting the order of things right and of constructing history by the negation of history through reversal. In this version of history, invaders like

the Achaemenid emperor Darius or Muhammad Ghuri, are turned from victors into defeated; history is rewritten through reversal of history.[28]

The perception of who is an outsider becomes a matter of contestation, following from the nation being the key reference point in history. The Aryans are seen as givers of civilization; so, considering the Aryans as invaders may be a sacrilegious proposition. There may have been different categories of critics of the British as a colonial power, but even from the nineteenth century, there also have been apologists for the British rule for, after all, they were invaders against invaders, the Muslims.

The second motif of heroes can be seen in the projection of the roles of historical personalities who figure uniformly in all history textbooks. This, in a sense, goes beyond biography in history and may be seen as deriving from the icon-making process reflected both in works of creative literature and historical works from the nineteenth century onward. In fact, literature and history reinforced each other's efforts in creating icons, as indeed other images of the past,[29] and their entry into textbooks was an inevitable process.

The motif of invasions perhaps created an initial space for the creation of icons, although one must note that simultaneously there was space provided by the perception of the country's glorious cultural past for its cultural icons. Thus Porus, who lost to Alexander but retained his dignity, was a national icon; so was Candragupta Maurya, not simply because he established an empire through the support of his minister Cāṇakya but also because he defeated Seleucus.

The later heroes, who all are heroes because they fought against invaders and foreigners, were Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, Candragupta Vikramāditya, Pṛthvīrāja Chauhāna, Rānā Pratāpa, Shivāji and so on. Once the space for the making of icons was created, it could of course expand, and the space could also be contested. The space could be used to accommodate such figures as Akbar, the Mughal emperor, but Akbar may also serve to show how sharply different perspectives may be brought to bear upon the historical evaluation of the same personality. For example, in textbooks written for Muslim students of schools set up by Markazi Dargah Islami, Rampur, and published by Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi, it is Akbar who is denounced and Aurangzeb, a villain of most history textbooks, projected as an ideal ruler. In textbooks specifically written for Muslim students, Aurangzeb is a natural subject for icon-making because of his perceived religiosity; for the author of this history, 'Muslim should study history with (the) true Muslim mentality'.[30]

The space for icons is of course space for cult figures of regional

history as well, again with contestation for ranking and attribution of weightage in the context of both regional and national history. Any alert historian working in India today knows that most icons transcend any review since they are invariably seen to represent national identity and aspirations. One can add here that it is becoming an established pedagogic practice that the space for icons, once created, can be, and is indeed used for installing new, live icons.[31]

The textbooks on Indian history, although not uniformly, and yet as isolated cases and as significant pointers to future trends, suggest the possibility of the creation of new national symbols and tracing them to a single cultural root. The device of appropriation, inherent in this, is already evident in the incorporation, in a prescribed book, of the fantastic theory that the important medieval monument of Qutb-Minar of Delhi was built, not by Qutbuddin Aibak but by Samudragupta.[32] History is constructed here, as in the case of the supposed defeat and humiliation of Darius, through the negation of history.

Taking my evidence essentially from the findings of the textbook review, I have been trying to argue that the reference point for the pedagogic strategy of communicating history, as it is for historical thinking, has been the nation, but it is a nation which can be and indeed is perceived differently. These perceptions, which do not necessarily follow the officially expressed 'Cultural Perspective',[33] calling for an 'understanding of the diverse cultural and social systems of the people living in different parts of the country', create spaces for contending memories. I have perhaps chosen some extremely deviant samples from a variety of lessons through which history is transmitted. But the possibilities of the varied uses of this space are nevertheless very real, and I have, in the Appendix to this essay, tried to show how the space can even be used to consciously fabricate a 'national' symbol first and then construct history for it.

V. Summing up

Let me try to sum up by viewing the Indian experience, based on an attempt to understand pedagogic strategies of history transmission, in relation to varieties of positions that historians take. I am aware that my coverage of, and accent on, textbook material is highly selective, and that my reference to historiography is mainly incidental; so, it should be necessary to clarify that my reference to historiography has only been in relation to a critical query: How do historical thinking and historical

writing tend to perceive, and respond to what is perceived as, cultural difference, and transmit images of cultural difference?

My impression is that one cannot simply situate the problem at the level of pedagogy and formulate it in terms of objective and non-objective or secular versus communal brands of history.[34] Instead, one has to probe into the roots as well as rationale of persistent aberrations and deviations from what are still considered as standard forms of history-writing.

It seems to me that we have to, up to a point, go along with the post-Orientalist critique of the Orientalist discourse and its derivative, the nationalist discourse. Many of the premises, which mark the transmission of history in a form which has large spaces for deviations and for relapsing into myths, may be traced to these sources. The post-Orientalist critique, however, does not seem to take us much further, because breaking down 'the totalizing claims of a nationalist historiography'[35] is no guarantee, by itself, that things that seem to have gone wrong in the past will correct themselves.

One also feels apprehensive about the position that the construction and transmission of images of the past is better done in cultural terms, in the expectation that the 'concept of culture', in its wide, anthropological sense, may serve as a possible basis for the 'reintegration' of different approaches to history,[36] or that it may be a viable alternative to the unrealistic goal of historical objectivity. The big question, in the context of history-writing, would still be: Whose culture? I have been trying to show that cultural difference may be as effectively accentuated in history construction as cultural unity, even within one perceived boundary of culture. One appropriate example of this would be a classic work on the history of Hindi literature (*Hindī Sāhitya Kā Itihās*) by R.C. Shukla, cited in an article by Krishna Kumar.[37] Seen as representing a pedagogic strategy, but really in keeping with a line of thinking identifying nationalism with Hindu nationalism, R.C. Shukla, in the work first published in 1929, took a 'strong ideological position indicating the irrelevance of the Urdu–Persian tradition for the development of modern Hindi and *performed a decisive symbolic act in shaping the cultural identity* of college educated men and women for generations' (emphasis added).

This is just a reminder of why historians perhaps ought always to remain apprehensive, despite the assurance of 'heteroglossia', of what cultural meanings and symbols will be projected in historical interpretations of cultural difference. One can understand the growing sensitivity in Western scholarship towards understanding and communicating

heterogeneity in cultural patterns, particularly those of 'others'; one may put this in Clifford Geertz's words as the 'systematic unpackings of the conceptual world' of other countries.[38] The problem, again, would be: if culture, like language, is a system of differences, then where do cultures converge in history? The interpretation of cultures is capable of being reduced to an 'act of interpretative violence',[39] both from within and outside, and that this apprehension, in the context of the scene of national culture, is shared by others, will be evident from the following quote which figures in the introduction to a symposium on 'Dimensions of Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism in Asia'[40]: '. . . ethnic or culturally based nationalism calls upon those elements of identity that we have limited ability to deny or alter, such as language, religion, place of origin or residence, skin color, and gender. It also asserts the claims of certain cultural characteristics and traditions, almost always containing a strong primordialist element.'

One cannot, at the same time, commit any longer the folly of offering a remedy in the form of the counter-violence of a straitjacketed brand of history; the 'heteroglossia' is here, to remain with us. Perhaps it is time again to remember that Marc Bloch forewarned us not so long back that 'even the future of our discipline' may come to depend on what he, following an earlier tradition, called 'Comparative History'. If we attempt to make history culture specific or nation specific, there will always remain the possibility of history crashing out even of the flexible space of its own possibilities which the concerns of Comparative History, if not the universal voice of history, set before the path of historians.

Appendix

Questions and Answers on the Place of Śrī Rāma's[41] Birth: A Text and Comments on It

The Text[42]

Question 1: Who was the first to get a temple made on the birth place of Śrī Rāma in Ayodhyā?

Answer: The great king Kuśa, son of Śrī Rāma.

Question 2: Who was the foreign invader who first destroyed the temple of Śrī Rāma?

Answer: Menander, the Yavana (Greek), 140 BC.

Question 3: Who got the present temple of Rāma constructed?

Answer: The great king Candragupta Vikramāditya, AD 380–417.

Question 4: Which Muslim plunderer led an attack on the temple of Ayodhyā in AD 1033?
Answer: Salar Masud, the nephew of Mahmud of Gazni.

Question 5: What was the consequence of Salar Masud's attack?
Answer: The devotees of Rāma massacred his army.

Question 6: Which Mughal invader destroyed the temple of Rāma in AD 1528?
Answer: Babar.

Question 7: What is the structure built by Babar on the Rāma temple known as?
Answer: Babri Masjid.

Question 8: Why is Babri Masjid not a Masjid?
Answer: Because, till today, no Muslim has offered *namaz* prayers at the structure.

Question 9: How many devotees of Rāma sacrificed themselves between 1528 and 1914 to free the Rāma temple?
Answer: Three lakhs and fifty thousand.

Question 10: When did the army of Sri Guru Govind Singh leave for Ayodhyā to make the Rāma temple free?
Answer: AD 1680.

Question 11: Followers of which protectors of religion (dharma) defeated the army of Mughal king Aurangzeb and made the Rāma temple free?
Answer: Sri Guru Govind Singh and Bābā Vaiṣṇavdāsji.

Question 12: When did the Muslims happily decide to hand over the birth place of Śrī Rāma to the Hindus?
Answer: AD 1847.

Question 13: How did the English aggravate the Temple Mosque quarrel?
Answer: The English put up a barrier between those who called (the place) *Rāma mandir* (temple of Rāma) and those who called it a *Masjid*.

Question 14: When did the district judge order that the lock on the Rāma temple had to be opened?
Answer: 1 February 1986.

Question 15: When did the activity of the worship of stones (*śilā-pūjan*) at different places begin for the purpose of the construction of the Rāma temple?
Answer: 30 September 1989.

Question 16: When did the *Karsevak* (volunteer) devotees of Rāma unfurl the *Bhagwā jhaṇḍā* (the saffron flag) at Śrī Rāma's place?
Answer: 30 October 1990.

Question 17: Give the names of those teenagers who sacrificed their lives when unfurling the Bhagwā flag at the temple of Śrī Rāma.
Answer: (i) Ram Kumar Kothari (ii) Sarad Kothari.

Comments

As an example of 'pedagogic strategy', the text, given above in a literal English translation, appears remarkable. In essence what is communicated is also present in other parts of this series on the Cultural Heritage of India in which too the temple of Rāma occupies an important position[43]; this particular lesson is remarkable because of the way it can function as a strategy for communication.

I. At the centre of the text is the temple of Rāma. It is projected as a symbol of Indian national culture through the fact of its being destroyed a number of times because of invasions; in other words, the motif of invasions[44] which are seen as bringing destruction to Indian society time and again relates equally validly to the temple of Rāma; like the regeneration of India, the temple too has to be regenerated: the two regenerations are implicitly interlinked.
II. The temple is given a genealogy. The original construction of the temple is traced to Kuśa, the son of Rāma; this certainly attributes to it a proximity to Rāma himself and thus a very desirable chronological status. What is similarly significant is that the rebuilding of the temple or making it free in different periods was done by outstanding figures of Indian history like Candragupta Vikramāditya and Guru Govind Singhji.
III. The destroyers of the temple and its restorers are identified; and so, one can make out which category of Indians relates to the essence of Indian culture and which attempted to destroy it. At the same time, however, this distinction collapses because of the overarching significance of the temple as a symbol for the whole nation. After all, it was restored by mighty kings in the past, lakhs sacrificed their lives to make the site free, a Sikh *guru* too led an army to set it free, and, in 1847, the Muslims happily handed the site over to the Hindus. In one sweep, the site with the temple on it becomes the locus of national consensus, and if the reality was conflict, the conflict was an aberration caused by the divisive act of the British, and not a real issue, because, after all, the Muslims had never offered *namaz* prayers at the shrine which was being irrelevantly called a *masjid*. If the remarkable achievement of the text, for its intended audience, is to establish the supremacy of a temple as a national symbol, in a country in which almost every village has a temple, there are a few additional points regarding the 'strategy' that may be noted.

1. The format of the text is that of questions and answers, neither the questions, nor the answers being in the slightest degree ambivalent; they constitute therefore a most affirmative assertion of the reality of the country's cultural history, leaving no space for any further query. Through simple memorization, one absorbs a definitive version of a historical–cultural reality.
2. Juxtaposition of characters, dates and events, the historicity of which can be verified, with those whose historicity cannot, has been used effectively

to collapse the barrier between myth and history; both have become open-ended, myth having gained the temporal legitimacy of history, and history, the timeless quality and sanctity of a myth.

3. The location of the lesson in what purports to be a book of knowledge concerning the cultural heritage of India and the great personalities of India adds to its legitimacy.
4. The motif of invasions and of seizure to which the temple was subjected has brought to the fore the value of sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of national heroes which brought about the regeneration of Indian society in the past; it is the sacrifice of the devotees of Rāma that will restore to this symbol of national culture its past. It should be noted that the text does not refer to any positive political action in present times. It associates both sacrifice and political action in the context of the past, and significantly, avoids making any explicit connection between them in the context of the present.

Notes and References

1. For the vision of the founders of the Annales school, see S. Clark, 'The Annales Historians', in Q. Skinner, ed., *The Return of Grand Theory in Human Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986). For Herodotus and Thucydides, see Walter Blanco and J.L. Roberts, eds, *Herodotus—The Histories* (New York, 1992); M.I. Finley, 'Thucydides the Moralist', in *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 48–59. Also Francois Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, translated by Janet Lloyd (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1988).
2. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* (A Journal of Medieval Studies), vol. 65 (1990), p. 59.
3. Peter Burke, 'Overture: The New History, Its Past and Its Future', in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–23.
4. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994).
5. Marc Bloch, 'A Contribution Towards a Comparative History of European Societies', in *Land and Work in Medieval Europe*, Selected Papers, translated by J.E. Anderson (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966).
6. Note the notion of comparative history present in the writings of V.G. Childe; see his *Social Evolution* (Fontana Library, 1963); *What Happened in History* (Harmondsworth, 1957); *Man Makes Himself* (Mentor Books, New York, 1957).

7. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990).
8. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1984), p. 12.
9. Madeliene Biardeau, *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*, translated by Richard Nice (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989), Introduction.
10. Partha Chatterjee, op. cit.
11. Ibid.
12. Nationalist historiography, and its extension into other brands of writing too, centring on the text of *Arthaśāstra*, attributed to Kauṭilya, is voluminous; as a sample, one may refer to the comparison instituted between the social and economic policies of Kauṭilya and the social legislation in Bismarck. See H.C. Ray, 'Was State-Socialism known in Ancient India? (A Study in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*)', *Sir Asutosh Mookerjee Silver Jubilee Volumes*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Calcutta University, Calcutta, 1922), pp. 429–46; idem., 'Economic Policy and Functions of the Kauṭilyan State', *Journal of the Department of Letters* (Calcutta University, Calcutta), vol. 13 (1926), pp. 1–30.
13. Note, for example, the titles of such works as: R.C. Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East*, vol. 1; *Champa* (Lahore, 1927); vol. 2: *Suvarnadvipa*, pts. 1 and 2 (Dacca, 1937–8); idem., *Hindu Colonies in the Far East* (Calcutta, 1944).
14. Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, paperback edition, 1982), p. 1.
15. Ibid.
16. Note Partha Chatterjee's plea: 'The project then is to claim for us, the once colonized, our imagination', op. cit.
17. See, as a sample of historical memory of groups which remain largely at a distance from Brāhmaṇic hegemony, M.L.K. Murty and Gunther D. Sontheimer, 'Prehistoric Background to Pastoralism in the Southern Deccan in the light of Oral Traditions and Cults of Some Pastoral Communities', *Anthropos*, vol. 75 (1980), pp. 163–84; Gunther D. Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities in Western India*, translated by Anne Feldhaus (Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1989), passim.
18. For relevant references, see Romila Thapar, 'Society and Historical Consciousness: The Itihāsa-Purāṇa Tradition' in S. Bhattacharyya and Romila Thapar, eds, *Situating Indian History for Sarvepalli Gopal* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986), pp. 353–83.
19. Note that the society which was founded to study early India's relations with Southeast Asian countries was named as the Greater India Society and its journal as *the Journal of the Greater India Society*. See H.B. Sarkar, *Cultural Relations between India and Southeast Asian Countries* (Delhi, 1985), ch. 2.

20. See Romila Thapar, 'Interpretations of Ancient Indian History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1978), pp. 1–25.
21. Cited in Partha Chatterjee, op. cit.
22. I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent (610–1947): A Brief Historical Analysis* (reprinted by Renaissance Publishing House, Delhi, 1985), viii: p. 88.
23. That oral transmission, backed by visual images communicated through technologically advanced media, can have tremendous impact on the formation of images of the past is suggested by the recent eminently successful TV serials on 'Indian epics'.
24. This is very strongly conveyed by efforts to officially control or intervene into the area of history textbooks prescribed in schools, and by occasional attempts to suppress textbooks which the National Council of Educational Research and Training got prepared. See M.H. Siddiqi, 'History-Writing in India', *History Workshop Journal* (1980), pp. 184–91.
25. 'National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation: Recommendations and Report', pts I and II (typescript), National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi (n.d.).
26. Reference may be made, in this context, to the series *Akhila Bhāratīya Saṃskṛti-Jñāna-Parīkṣā* (All India Test on Cultural Knowledge) (Saṃskṛti Bhavan, Kurukshetra, n.d.).
27. 'National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation: Recommendations and Report', pt. I, Appendix 1.
28. Ibid., Appendix 2.
29. The genre of 'historical' novels and poems and plays either dedicated to or woven around history's heroes and heroines had a rapid development in India from the nineteenth century onward. The literary writings have had a profound impact on historical consciousness and the 'icons' of history are identical with the 'icons' of literature.
30. 'National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation: Recommendations and Report', pt. I, Appendix 3.
31. The trend, which is new, is to make the achievements of a political bigwig an integral part of a textbook on Social Studies at the school level.
32. 'National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation: Recommendations and Report', pts. I and II.
33. 'National Policy on Education—1986 (with modifications undertaken in 1992)', Ministery of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, New Delhi (n.d.), pp. 6–7 (typescript).
34. For the first coherent statement of how communal assumptions have permeated writings on Indian history, see Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*, 2nd edition (People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1977).

35. Partha Chatterjee, op. cit.
36. Peter Burke, op. cit.
37. Krishna Kumar, 'Hindu Revivalism and Education in North-Central India', *Social Scientist*, no. 209, vol. 18, no. 10) (1990), pp. 4–26.
38. See the discussions in Gabrielle: M. Spiegel, op. cit., and Vincent Crapanzano, 'The Hermes Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds, op. cit.
39. Ibid.
40. Refer to 'Dimensions of Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism in Asia—A Symposium', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1 (1994), p. 6.
41. Rāma is the central figure of the celebrated epic *Rāmāyaṇa* which is available not only in a Sanskrit version but in numerous other versions as well. Rāma is also at the centre of a religious cult, and there are persistent attempts, which have gained greater urgency in recent years, to prove his historicity as well as that of the site of his birth.
42. This is lesson 19, in *Akhila Bhāratīya Saṃskṛti-Jñāna-Parīkṣā*, i.e., 'All India Test on Cultural Knowledge', pt. 7 (Saṃskṛti Bhavan, Kurukshetra, Haryana, n.d.). There are similar lessons, in the form of capsules, in other parts of the series. According to an estimate given in a publication of 1990, the number of schools, at which the text given here is taught, would be around 3000. However, the estimate need not be taken to exactly specify how communication of such a text would be distributed. See Krishna Kumar, 'Hindu Revivalism and Education in North Central India', *Social Scientist*, vol. 18, no. 10 (1990), pp. 4–26. The number seems to have gone up after 1990; it was being claimed during 1993–4 that the total number of students appearing at the cultural knowledge tests was 355,282 and that the total number of schools run by the organization was 6000 with 1,200,000 students and 40,000 teachers, 'National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation: Recommendations and Report', pt. II (typescript), p. 90. The original lesson is in Hindi; for this essay, its literal English is being presented here.
43. The same lesson figures in slightly different forms in parts 8 and 10 of the series.
44. According to one version of the text, the temple suffered seventy-seven invasions in the past, 'National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation, Recommendations and Report', pt. II, p. 93.

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